Manga & Anime!

#148

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

TRAVEL WITH US TO TOKYO FOR A FASCINATING BEHIND-THE-SCENES TRIP INTO THE WORLD OF JAPANESE COMICS & ANIMATION!

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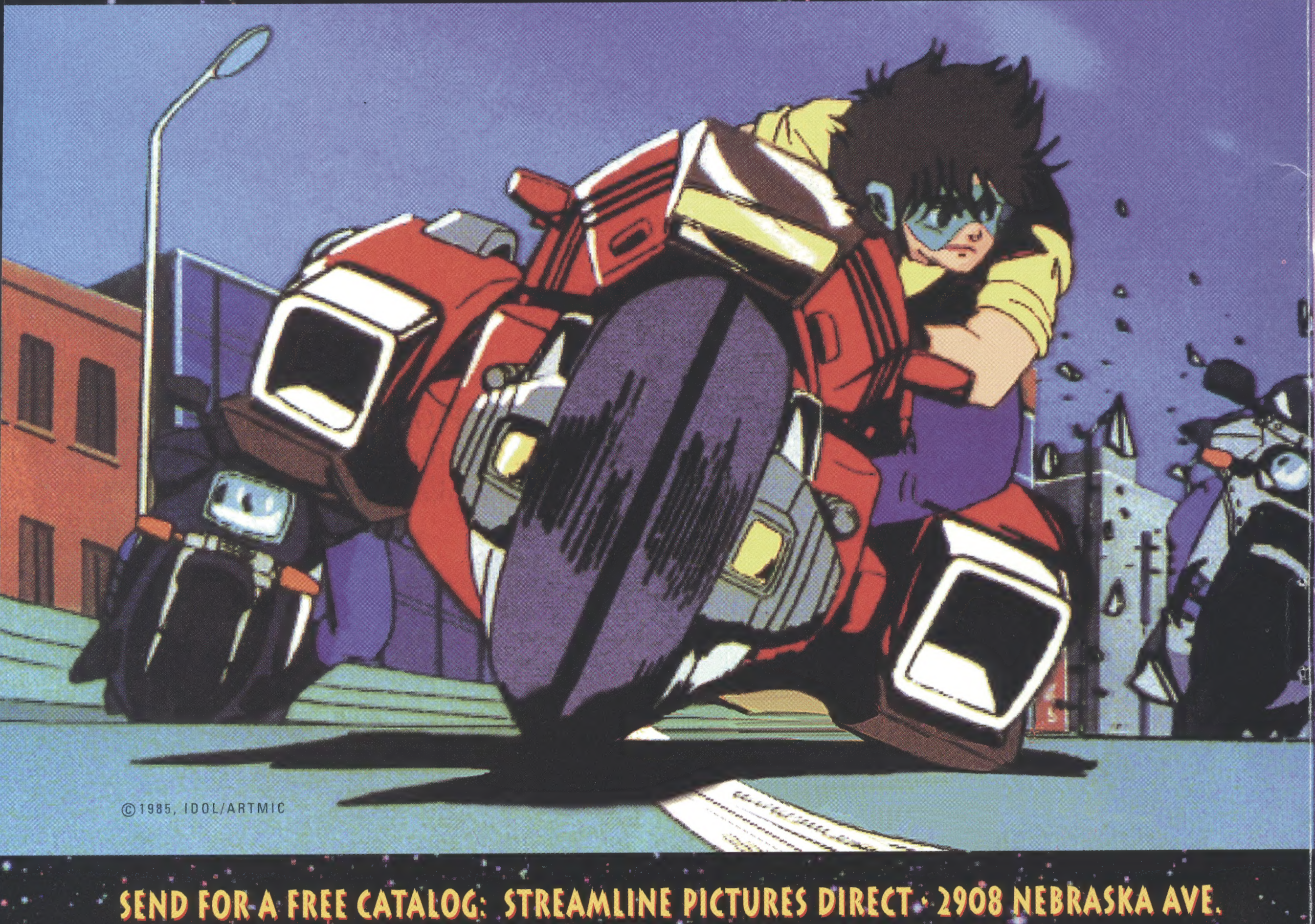

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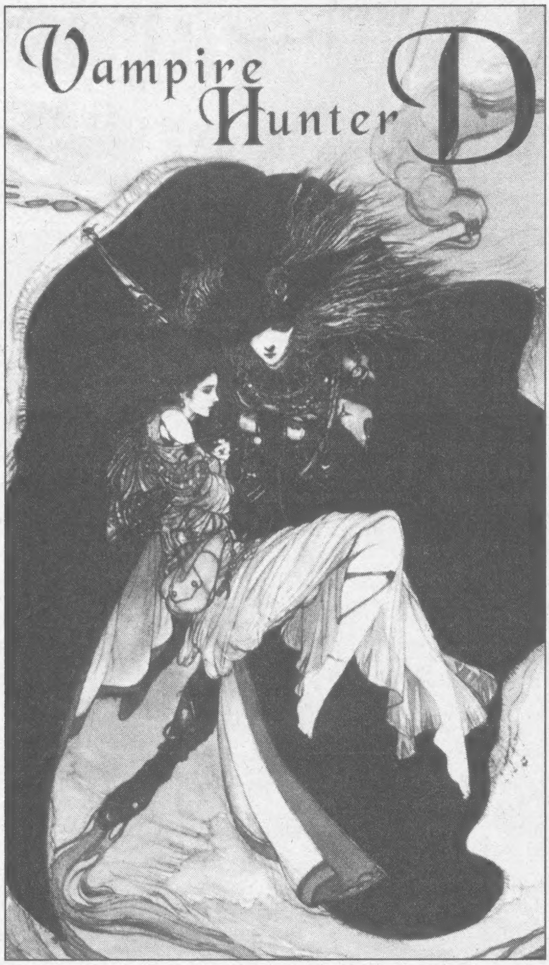
What is Anime and why is everybody talking about it?

Over the past few years, animation produced for the Japanese domestic market, known as *anime*, has been finding its way onto shelves in comic book specialty retail shops and video stores throughout the country. It is a business which has evolved out of an underground, unlicensed movement to bring this material into the States by the vanity duplication (read "bootlegging") of imported *anime* laser disks. The material which has surfaced has remained, for the most part, niche product which augments the imported *manga* (Japanese comics) and occasional imported video game which makes its way West.

The potential for mainstream exposure to *anime* will be put to the test by several factors including the syndicated television release of SAILOR MOON and DRAGON BALL as well as upcoming video releases by mainstream distribution entities such as SONY, POLYGRAM and ORION PICTURES. There are rumors that MARVEL may even be considering entering into this field.

SONY is launching its effort in the anime market with an animated version of STREET FIGHTER II offered at an extreme sell-through price point. POLYGRAM has taken on the distribution of the US branch of a UK company, MANGA ENTERTAINMENT. And ORION HOME VIDEO has entered the picture by making an output deal with STREAMLINE PICTURES to serve as the distribution arm of Streamline's VIDEO COMICS library.

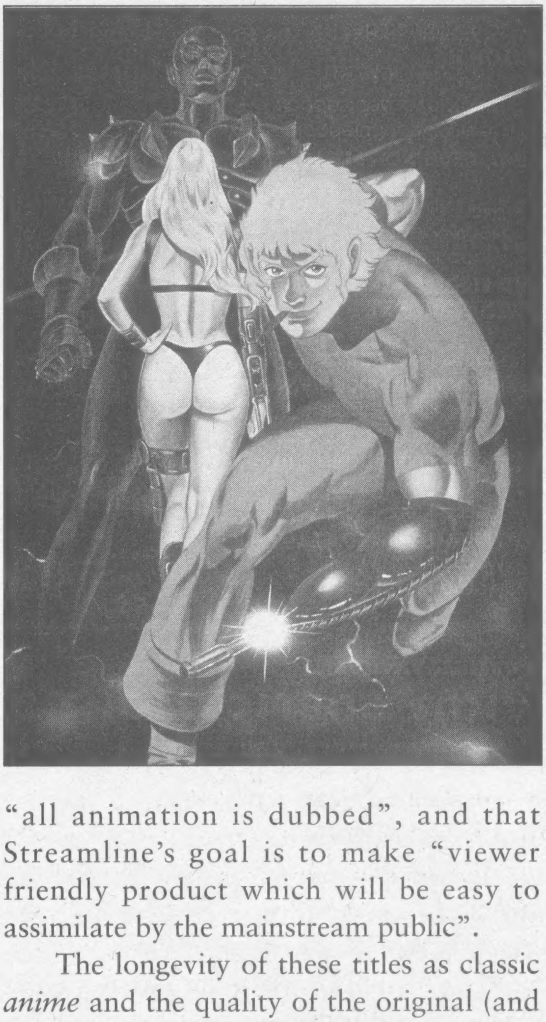
Each of these distribution companies has a different approach in attempting to bring this material to the mass market. SONY and POLYGRAM are handling the



video distribution as a traditional music company distributor. ORION, on the other hand, has concentrated on distributing Streamline's VIDEO COMICS as a traditional video distributor.

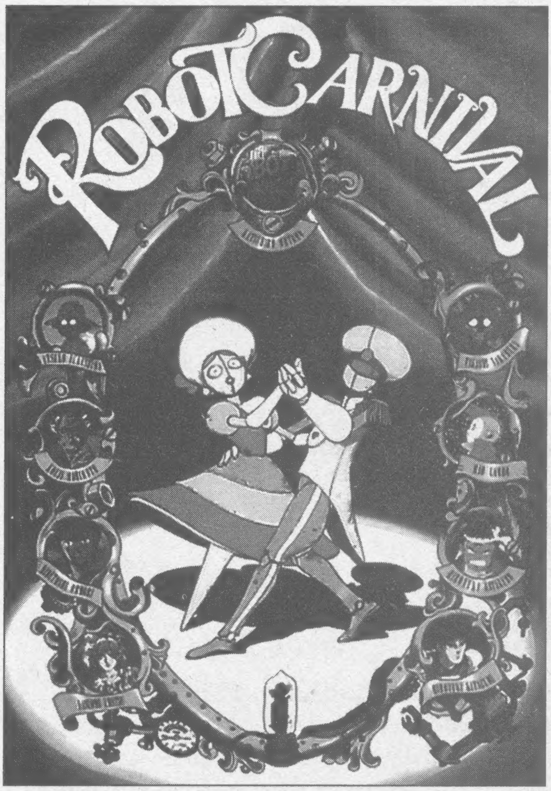
The ORION approach seems to work given the context of Streamline's library. Since its inception seven years ago, Streamline Pictures has concentrated on acquiring the best theatrical *anime* available for distribution in North America. Streamline's initial exploitation of these films begins with theatrical exhibition in independent theaters and through theatrical repertory. Once an animated film has received some critical reception and played through a number of major cities, it is made available for home video. Streamline's string of theatrical releases include AKIRA, FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, THE PROFESSIONAL, VAMPIRE HUNTER D, ROBOT CARNIVAL, LENSMAN, WICKED CITY and the forthcoming SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA.

Another factor in the success of VIDEO COMICS has been the company's focus on distributing English language versions of these films. The bulk of the material released in the U.S. has been put out in subtitled versions. Streamline's president, Carl Macek (an animation producer in his own right), has noted that "all animation is dubbed", and that Streamline's goal is to make "viewer friendly product which will be easy to assimilate by the mainstream public".



The longevity of these titles as classic *anime* and the quality of the original (and English-language post) production have positioned Streamline's VIDEO COMICS titles as an "evergreen" library which sell significant numbers for every title, month after month. A recent article in NEWSWEEK still points to AKIRA as the major title in this niche genre.

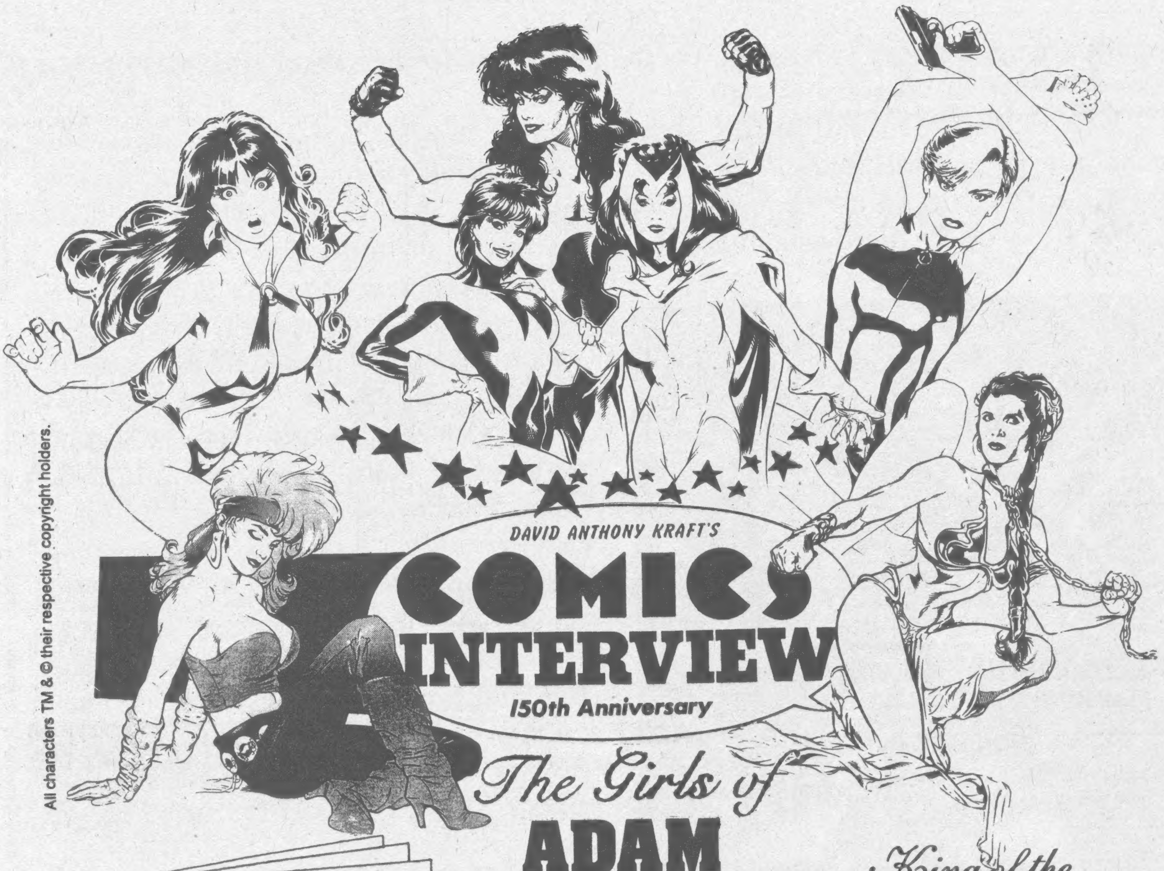
Recent activity in the acquisition of *anime* properties by a growing number of US distributors has given Streamline and Orion cause to reevaluate their marketing strategy. But rather than compete with the glut of product which is flooding the market, Streamline is content to work on quality productions. "It's like 'The Tortoise and the Hare', every new company is trying to beat the competitor to the punch with the latest material from Japan. We had a goal in mind when we started, we made a list of titles and went after that list. So far we have been able to acquire distribution rights to nearly every title we set out to bring to market."



The strategy seems to be working. Most new product produced for the domestic Japanese market is getting farther and farther away from the neutral international productions of the late 1980's. Following the phenomenal success of highly ethno-centric, teen adventure series SAILOR MOON ($250 million at last count) most new anime productions incorporate the same sort of super-deformed characters and physical gestures which contributed to the programs uncanny popularity. But as these gestures and design elements become more and more esoteric and obtuse, the ability of this type of material to take hold in the "savvy", mainstream US domestic merchandising arena is uncertain.

The future, as far as Macek and Streamline are concerned, is in co-production and joint ventures with anime producers and rights holders. By combining the best of both East and West a new category of product will be unleashed for global consumption. Several other companies have the similar viewpoints. Manga Entertainment, Bandai and several other companies are pre-buying territories for new anime productions. Jim Lee's GEN^{13} is scheduled to hit the market sometime in 1996 as a direct-to-video production. The difference is that GEN^{13} geared for a Western audience while acknowledging the *anime* style. The Manga/Bandai approach is still focused on the Japanese market at the linchpin for the production. Streamline, on the other hand, working with veteran *anime* producers, plans to develop a series of projects which will play to both markets. It will be interesting to see which approach wins out.

In the meantime, VIDEO COMICS will continue to market the classics and strive to get more and more exposure in the mass market. With the pioneering efforts of mainstream corporations such as Streamline/Orion, Polygram, SONY and Pioneer anime is here to stay.



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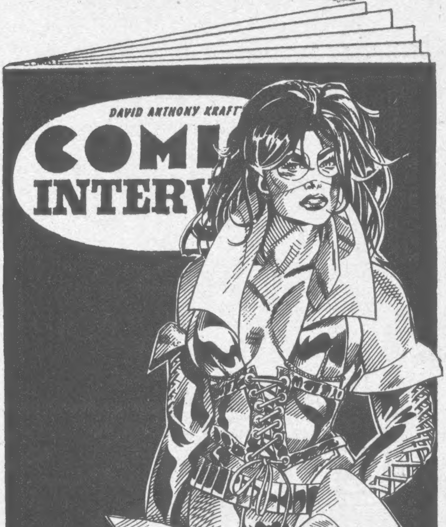

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UP FRONT

WHERE IT'S AT!

Anime and manga acolytes can feel free to skip this editorial and jump straight to the good stuff crowding this special issue to glean the scene.

As for the rest of you, if your interest is piqued by the "East Meets West" interview and some of the other, more detailed material in this issue and you want to find out first hand about the fundamentals, you can try some of the stuff available straight from our advertisers this issue — by mail order or (if you're lucky enough to be near one) by loading up at a well-stocked comics shop.

There are also several simple intros that have appeared in various forms at Dark Horse or in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE by **Toren Smith** (who knows whereof he speaks).

If none of those are at hand, and you want both a quick course *and* a super source for ordering manga and anime so you can finally see for yourself what the excitement's about, I recommend the Right Stuf International catalog (available for $1 from P.O. Box 71309, Des Moines, IA 50325). It's an education in itself, an easy all-around intro to anime, and a generally good guide.

There's a whole world of wild stuff out there, so happy hunting!

-Dak

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"The Japanese on one side and the Americans on the

Outside the Tezuka Museum in Tokyo, from left to right: Tomoko Kanai, translator; Stine Walsh; Ann Eisner; Richard and Wendy Pini; Brian Stelfreeze; and Yoshihiro Shimizu, director of Tezuka Productions.

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other, sizing each other up like a gunfight. *(Laughter.)*"

EAST MEETS WEST

"American comic-book creators go to Japan, talk to Japanese artists, like a *summit!*"

As the American superhero mainstream becomes moribund, a swell of interest in all things manga and anime has begun to unfold. First, it seemed mainly that American comics creators were discovering, appreciating and being influenced by the Japanese material — but then that enthusiasm spread far and wide.

There is, of course, a parallel interest in all things American among the Japanese. Our comics and animation were, after all, the inspiration for much of what they have now made their own.

Yin and yang.

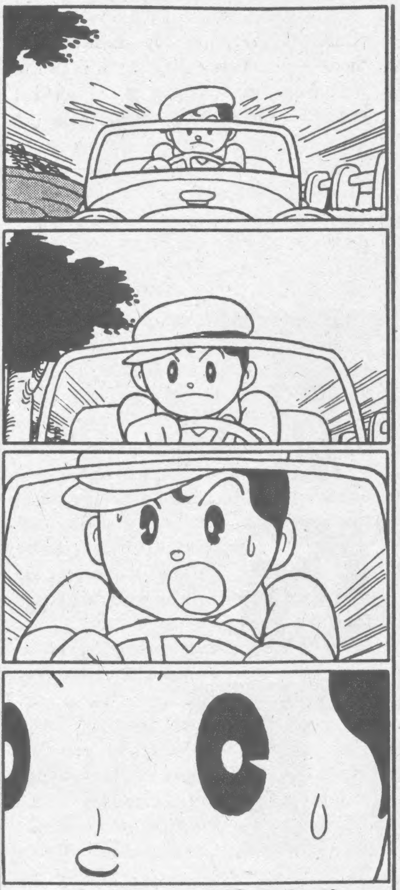
So what could be more fitting than a coming together of the creators from both cultures? To this end, Tezuka Productions sponsored an informal summit of sorts, inviting Will and Ann Eisner, Richard and Wendy Pini, and Gaijin Studios' Stine Walsh and Brian Stelfreeze for a tete-a-tete in Tokyo.

It's been said that Tezuka Productions is to Japan what Disney is to the U.S. Dr. Osamu Tezuka, founder of the "wide-eyed" look that has become the trademark of Japanimation, has passed on. But there are those in his corporation, such as president Takayuki Matsutani, who wish to fulfill his dream.

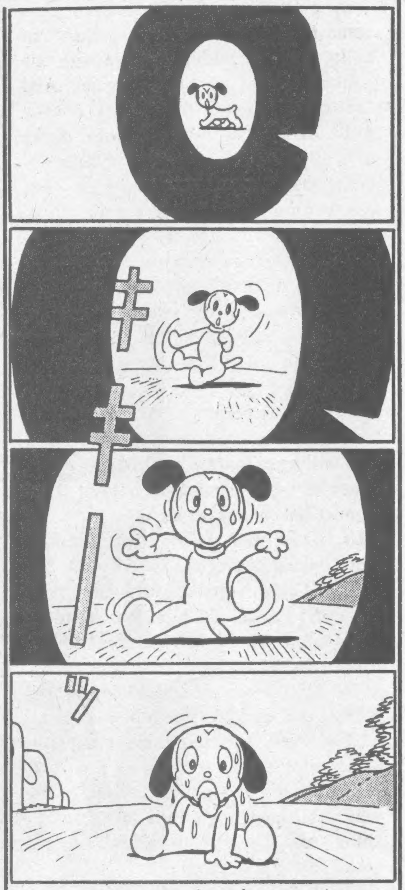
Dr. Tezuka believed that the image is a universal concept. No language barriers, maybe some cultural differences, but he believed that images — comics, animation and the like — were the greatest way to unite the world. This symposium united, for a few days at least, some of the greatest Japanese creators and publishers with some of the cream of the American comics crop. These first steps were taken towards realizing Dr. Tezuka's dream.

And so we publish this interview, as another step toward the fulfillment of that dream, and to give all our readers the opportunity to accompany the lucky few who saw Japan in all her splendor, and met with some of the greatest creators on the other side of the globe . . .

“Osamu Tezuka is basically the father of ani-



Art this spread: Sample of sequential storytelling . . .



. . . by manga & anime master Osamu Tezuka.

JULIA R. MATHER: *You recently went to Japan, were taken over there as part of a delegation, is that right? How did that come about?*

BRIAN STELFREEZE: Well, the whole thing, it's almost like one of those weird made-for-TV stories. There was a guy by the name of **Osamu Tezuka,** who's basically the father of animation in Japan; he's like the **Walt Disney** of Japan, you can go up to any kid and mention his name and it's magic.

His dream was that comic books were universal, that comic books spoke a language that transcended everything: Comics in Japan were just like comics in the United States were just like comics in Sweden were just like comics everywhere, so *anyone* could pick up any comic and read it. You know, you might not understand the language or the lettering, but as far as things happening from panel to panel you *do* understand that. His dream was basically to *unify* people through comics, through *manga!* It was a dream that he was never able to realize, but it was something that was very important to him. When he died the company that he formed, Tezuka Productions, basically stayed true to that dream.

What happened with us, this was sort of a first step in realizing **Tezuka's** dream by getting a group of American comic-book creators, and just artists in general, to go over to Japan, talk to a group of Japanese comic book artists, the creative people over there. To just have an open forum, almost like a *summit!* This is the way *we* do things, this is the way *you* do things, let's talk about it. There was no real *goal* of the meeting, basically it was just let's do this and see what happens.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *That's hard to understand, because things usually are goal oriented, right?*

BRIAN: Yeah . . . it was really odd because when we got over there we were kind of looking around thinking: What's the catch, what's going to happen? And they really put out a lot, sent us first class tickets and everything like that, so it cost a whole lot of money. The American group was Stine Walsh and I, **Will Eisner** and his wife, and **Wendy** and **Richard Pini.** We were just kind of looking at it like, you know: We're an odd group of people, why us? We really ended up finding that the value of the whole thing wasn't monetary, but they gained a lot from having us over there; and really *we* gained a lot from being over there.

JULIA: *I can see there's an older generation, a middle generation, and you're of the younger generation: Was that something they had done deliberately? Or did they want someone who had done strips, someone who had done painting, someone who had done superheroes? Or did they just go to conventions and see who had really big crowds around them?* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Well, from talking to them through our translator, it was really neat because we discovered that Tezuka Productions basically figured with a few people they wanted as *wide* a representation of the American comic-book market as possible. And it is quite different from their market. So, with me they scored big-time! I'm a *popular* comic book artist; I'm doing BATMAN, which is like the big thing in America — and at the same time I did some stuff for X-MEN, which is *super* popular, they know about that. I was a representative of modern, fast-track, mainstream comics.

And at the same time I do covers — a cover artist is a weird thing for them. That whole concept is totally alien to them. And I do *painted* covers, which is some-

> **“We were thinking, what's the catch? The value of the whole thing wasn't monetary.”**

mation in Japan. He's like the Walt Disney."

thing else that's totally alien. And at the same time I'm a black artist. So, basically, they scored big because with one illustrator they got a whole bunch. And the same thing with **Will Eisner**. I mean, **Will Eisner** has been in comic books virtually since the beginning, so he represents that entire generation. He's done every form of comics, everything! So, they scored pretty major.

JULIA: *And he writes, too.*

BRIAN: Yeah. He's a great guy. We really got to know him quite well on the trip. But, oddly enough, out of all of us that went there, **Will Eisner** is the closest thing to *their* comic-book market.

STINE WALSH: And the **Eisners** are very young-hearted, open to new things, and willing to share. They had a lot to say that was worth listening to, not just about comics but about everything.

JULIA: *So, what do you think was their goal behind asking the Pinis?*

STINE: She's a female independent.

BRIAN: Yeah, she's a female independent comic-book producer. That's something—

STINE: That's kind of rare. They wanted a cross section of what was comics in the United States, and she represents a totally different facet.

BRIAN: It's independent comics, it's self-publishing, it's a little bit of everything. And the female over there gets a totally different treatment.

STINE: They do totally different kinds of books that are *completely* geared towards the feminine audience.

BRIAN: Yeah, so it was good to have her there. With a handful of artists they got a little part of a large chunk of the American scene.

JULIA: *What's strange is if you had gone to someone who is maybe a little bit outside but very knowledgeable, if you had gone to Maggie Thompson or someone like that and said you wanted a cross section of what is American comics, from an American point of view, the people who were chosen probably would not have been chosen.*

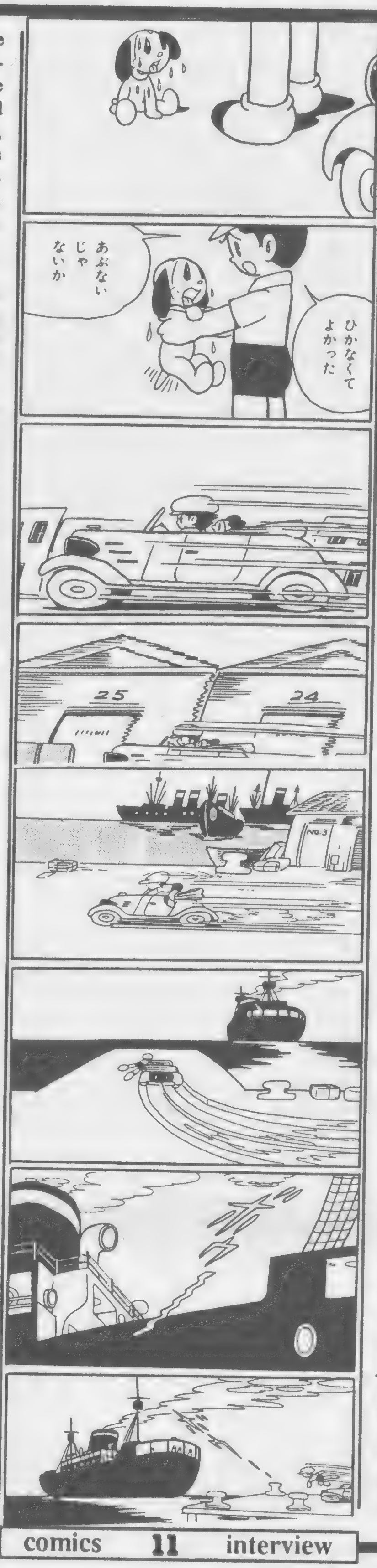
BRIAN: No, not at all.

STINE: Well, it was pretty much on the shoulders of **Fred Schodt**, the translator. He translates a lot of Japanese books, and Fred talked to a lot of his friends. I think in some ways it was *more* of an American perspective, but the Americans who were involved are very influenced and involved in Japanese comics.

DAK: *Were you familiar with Japanese comics and animation?*

BRIAN: Yeah, I was very familiar with a lot of Japanese comics. But the *odd* thing, something that's really strange, is with the American perception of Japanese comics, there's something a little bit different in *that*. What a lot of people really get a kick out of here in America are the Japanese comics that are sort of *like* American comics. Creators like **Katsushiro Otomo** and **Masamune Shirow** and even **Kenichi Sonoda**, these guys are really popular here for the manga that they produce, so I thought, "Wow, I'll get to meet those guys!"

But the people that were there were the *popular* Japanese comics producers, and the more I got into the culture the more and more I realized that I kind of thought I knew a lot about it but I really didn't. I really didn't know much about it at all, you know. And you have to really pay attention to the fact that *most* of their stuff that's popular *here* is not really that popular *there*. But it's the stuff that can be sold over here. The stuff that's popular over there, people over here wouldn't care for it that much.



JULIA: *What sprang to mind while you were saying how comics are a universal medium: In theory, yes, that's true, because basically if you look at it from a blank perspective there are pictures that tell a story — as long as you're not blind you can get the story. But the* cultural *differences are so huge, what would anybody actually care to read? That's the big hiccup, I think, in Tezuka's plan.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *So, I guess this was to try and maybe transcend that a little?*

BRIAN: Yeah, it was. Something that I noticed when I was over there is Japan is a *very* old country. Their civilization is one of the oldest in the world. They've been doing their thing for a long time. Because it's so rich, they hold it very dear, and most of their comic books serve to basically remind them of their culture, of the people, of everything that they do. Their comics are basically a mirror that's held up to their society.

In America, because we're pretty young as a country, we're pretty young as a civilization, we couldn't care less about our culture a lot of the time. Our fashions, we burn through them as fast as we can. Things are always constantly changing over here. The biggest thing about American comics is that it's actually escapism *from* the culture, you know. You actually read an American comic to get away from things, you're *especially* not reminded of what's going on.

There are a lot of Japanese comics about, you know, a boy spends a day fishing, or a comic book entirely devoted

"Their comics are a mirror held up to their society."

to a basketball game, or to golfing, things like that. That's important stuff to the Japanese.

DAK: *They even have BUSINESS COMICS.*

BRIAN: Yeah, BUSINESS COMICS! This stuff is not fantasy oriented, you know. This stuff is really personal. There are some comics that *are* fantasy, but the really popular ones are the real subtle ones about the culture. But American comics, it's BATMAN! Here's a person that's totally *against* society. SUPERMAN! Here's someone who can fly around and do all these amazing things.

DAK: *But they like a lot of our movies, and our movies are culturally or aesthetically very similar, they're all big tough guys duking it out against the world. So, when they translate our comics do they go for those kind of comics at all? What is their appreciation of our comics, if any?*

Translator/organizer Fred Schodt and his book.

FREDERIK L. SCHODT
Author, Inside the Robot Kingdom
AMERICA AND THE FOUR JAPANS
FRIEND • FOE • MODEL • MIRROR
A concise guide to understanding how America's views of Japan have changed—and must continue to change for the sake of our economic and cultural future

BRIAN: That's kind of hard to say, especially with the younger generation. You have a younger generation of Japanese kids who are basically almost exactly like American kids, so you're going to have some standard things that are popular across the board, things like SPIDER-MAN and stuff like that. But something . . . I don't know, it's kind of weird, everything American is popular over there. There's a small group of Americans who enjoy Japanese comics, who enjoy the Japanese culture and really get into it, and you have the same thing over there, a larger group of Japanese who really love the American culture, they like a SPIDER-MAN comic book because it's an *American* thing, like an X-MEN comic book because it's an *American* thing.

JULIA: *What did you find most enjoyable about the actual trip?*

STINE: The food was good. *(Laughter.)* People were very very outgoing. It's not like when people visit here, if they're lost and they ask for directions people here get very irritated because they don't speak English. You don't see Americans very often stopping and being courteous to anybody from any other country: Learn English, get out of here. They're not like that. We had people walk up to us and say, "Are you all right? Do you know what area you're in? Let me show you how the subway works. Do you have the correct change?" A complete stranger on the street! "Are you sure you're not lost? Do you know how to get where you're staying?" Complete strangers would just go totally out of their way to be friendly and accommodating, having no idea why

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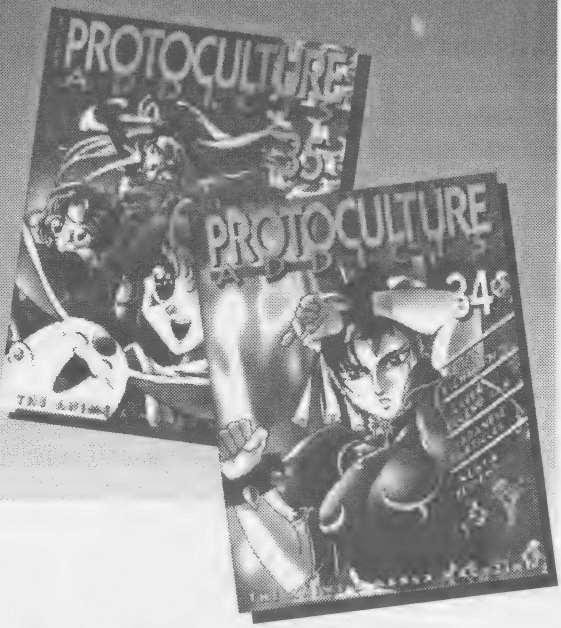

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"American comics is escapism *from* the culture."

Feasting, Japanese style: Tomoko Kanai, Ann Eisner, Stine Walsh, Brian Stelfreeze and Richard Pini.

you're even there, just because they know you're not Japanese. They were really amazing. It's almost frightening.

BRIAN: Something that was really fun, though, is English is taught as a second language in a lot of the schools over there, so when we were there — because we look *incredibly* American — what ends up happening is if we stop for just a second and look up on a railway sign to find out which train we have to go to, a Japanese person steps in, like, "I spent so many years learning English; here is a pair of Americans; I'm going to get in there and try out this English!" *(Laughter.)* They really get a kick out of trying to speak English, you can tell that they're just really *excited* that they're talking to an American. And they kind of know the language. So not speaking that much Japanese actually ended up being a benefit as far as meeting people.

DAK: *Besides being culturally centered, are there other differences between Japanese and American comics, the Japanese comic-book industry as a whole compared to the American comic-book industry as a whole?*

BRIAN: Something that's *completely* different over there from over here, their entire comic book industry is creator owned. There is no Japanese character like Superman where this artist and this writer work on it this month.

DAK: *Yet — wasn't this a company-sponsored thing?*

BRIAN: It was a company-sponsored thing, but Tezuka Productions, most of the comic-book work that they do is reprints of **Tezuka's** work. And there are a lot of other companies that in a sense went in with them on this, companies like Kodansha, which is the biggest comic-book producer over there.

But even a company like Kodansha, which is bigger than Marvel will *ever* be, they don't have characters. They will talk to **Kenichi Sonoda** and say produce *this* sort of book for us, and **Kenichi Sonoda** will come up with an idea, come up with characters, and produce it. And **Kenichi Sonoda** will *own* the characters, will *own* the concept. The company will just publish it and that's it; everything over there is creator owned.

And it's really weird, characters are so important. When I went over there people would say, "Oh, you created Batman!" I'm like, "No, I had nothing to do with that." Then they would ask, "Okay, what characters did you create?" It was a really important thing to them to talk about, "I created this character, I'm really proud of that." And, of course, I'm an American

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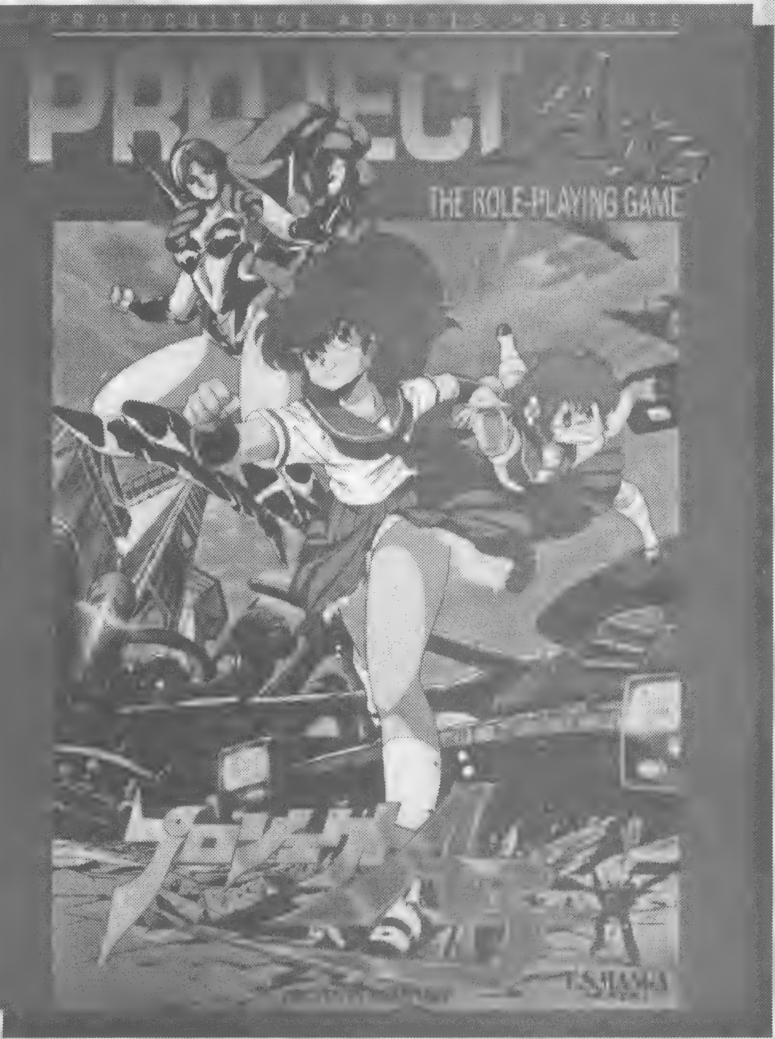

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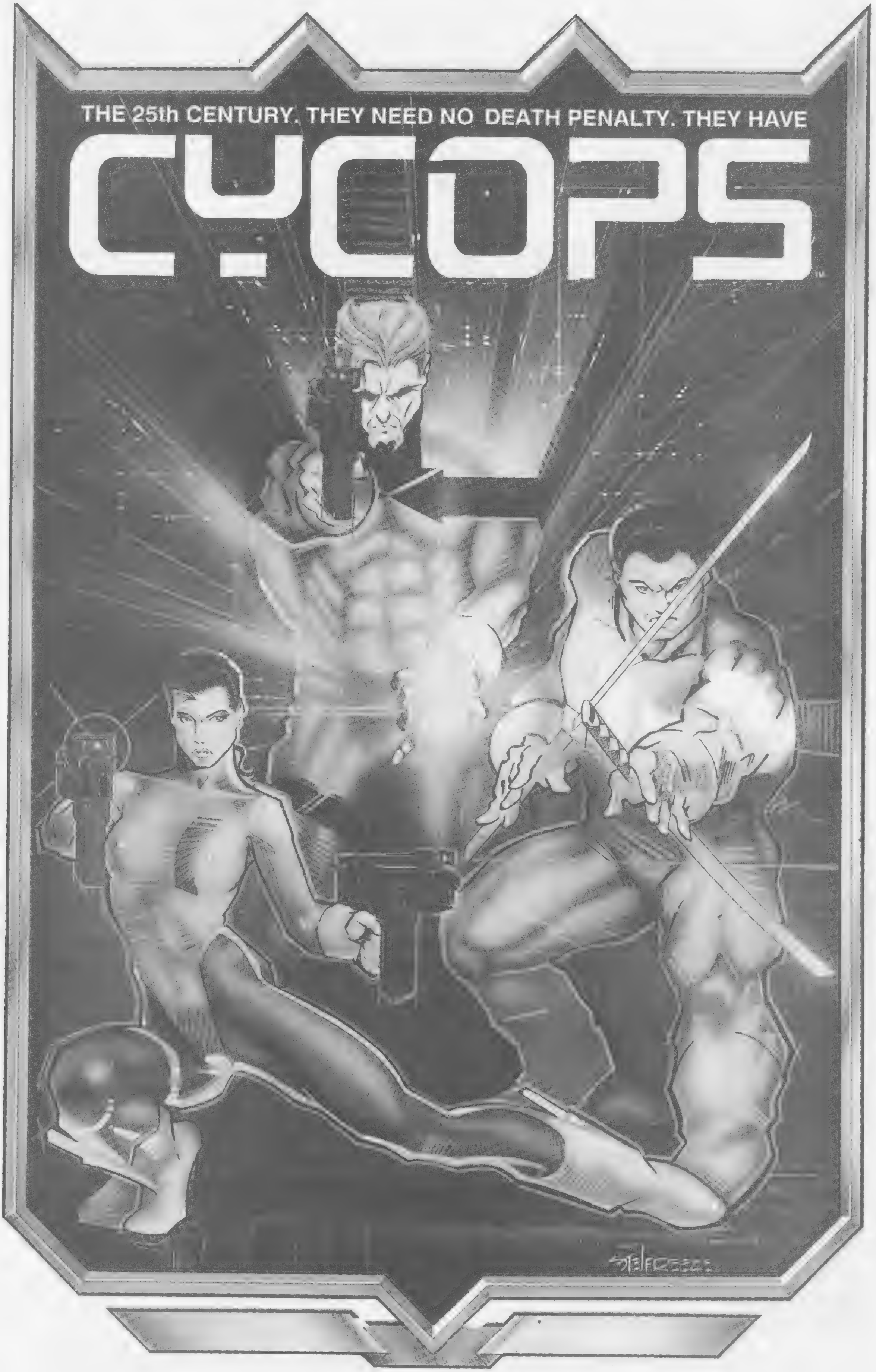
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“Their comic-book industry is creator-owned.”

mainstream artist who really hasn't created hardly *any* characters. I'd say, “Well, CYCOPS, I had a lot to do with the creation of that, but I didn't create the characters.” That was really strange to them. They were really surprised that I would be a popular comic-book artist and not have created a bunch of characters.

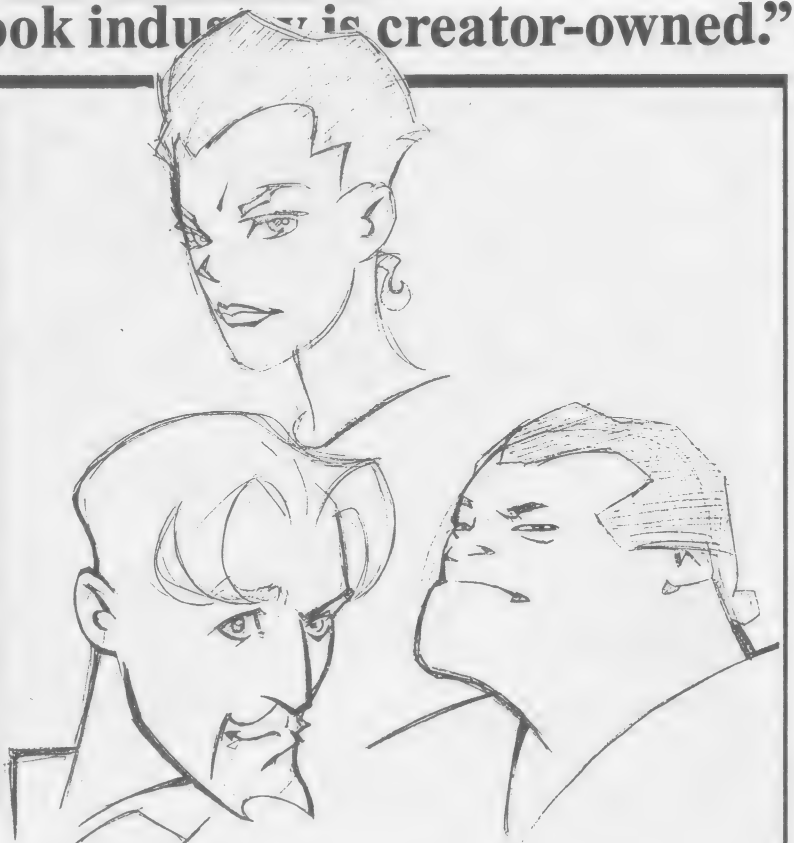
JULIA: *And for the most part they either team up and write and draw, or swap back and forth, or write and draw their own material?*

BRIAN: Most of them write and draw their own material. There are a few — very *very* few — a few writers that only write stuff, a few artists that only draw stuff.

DAK: *Like Koike and Kojima?*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *Back in COMICS INTERVIEW #52 Frank Miller interviewed Koike and Kojima — sort of a Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. They had done LONE WOLF AND CUB, and they actually say in their interview that their sales were about six to eight million copies on each set of LONE WOLF AND CUB. It was then at that time* very *popular.*



Brian, photographing his own reflection in a huge chrome ball in Tokyo.

Facing page: CYCOPS cover painting in the patented Stelfreeze style. “Japanese artists say that in American comics the artwork is far too detailed.”

Above: Brian's simplified and highly-stylized design for the CYCOPS as they would appear in animation or manga form. East meets West, indeed.

BRIAN: What's really weird, the **Pinis** asked what's the total revenue that's made in Japanese comics. We were in a room with four or five of the top Japanese producers, and they kind of like . . . obviously, this was the first time they were given this question. They kind of like scratched their heads and whispered to each other, and the word “*trillion*” was used. *(Laughter.)* I was hoping it was going to be several million, but they jumped over billion and went into the trillion mark.

DAK: *Is this in units or on currency?*

BRIAN: Currency.

JULIA: *Something to yen for.* (Laughter.)

DAK: *Groan. Well, getting back to the basics of the trip and everything, what did you guys actually do?*

"The creator might lay out the pages, then get a

BRIAN: When we got there the first thing that we did is we had a meeting with Japanese comic book artists and creative people. That was neat because it was kind of a little banquet thing, sort of a dinner.

JULIA: *You were in Tokyo, right?*

BRIAN: Yeah, we were in Tokyo, and this was actually at the hotel, the first meeting was at the hotel. They were sitting on one side, you know — basically it was like two U.N. tables facing each other, the Japanese on one side and the Americans on the other side. They were obviously just coming in and looking at stuff; looking across our table you could see their table and they had stacks of comic books from America. They were looking through them, thumbing through some of the stuff, reading some of it. And right next to each of our seats we had comic books of theirs, and we were looking through them. So we're all looking at the people over there while we're looking at their work, they're all doing the same thing — it's like we're sizing each other up, starting off almost like a gunfight. *(Laughter.)* But it ended up that we were all laughing and having a really great time.

DAK: *What did they think of American comics?*

BRIAN: Oh, what's really funny, the Japanese artists say that in American comics the artwork is far too detailed, that it belongs in a museum not on comic-book pages. They're in *awe* of the *detail* that's in American comics. And they actually brought up some neat points. Something that really has changed my views on comic-book storytelling, they were basically saying that the artwork in American comics is so beautiful that you look at the artwork and often times it's difficult to pay attention to the story; you're too busy looking at the beautiful artwork.

Over there, they put enough artwork on the page to get the story across; that's it! You can't really pay attention to the artwork because you're too involved in the story. And they design their books to read very quickly. When we were on the trains looking at people reading Japanese comics, it's almost like watching a commercial for a speed reading course, they flip a page every ten seconds or so. If you take a look at what is the standard American comic, something like X-MEN, it's about $1.75, it's something that's going to have about 22 or 24 pages.

JULIA: *And about a half hour of reading, wouldn't you say?*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *It depends how fast you read.*

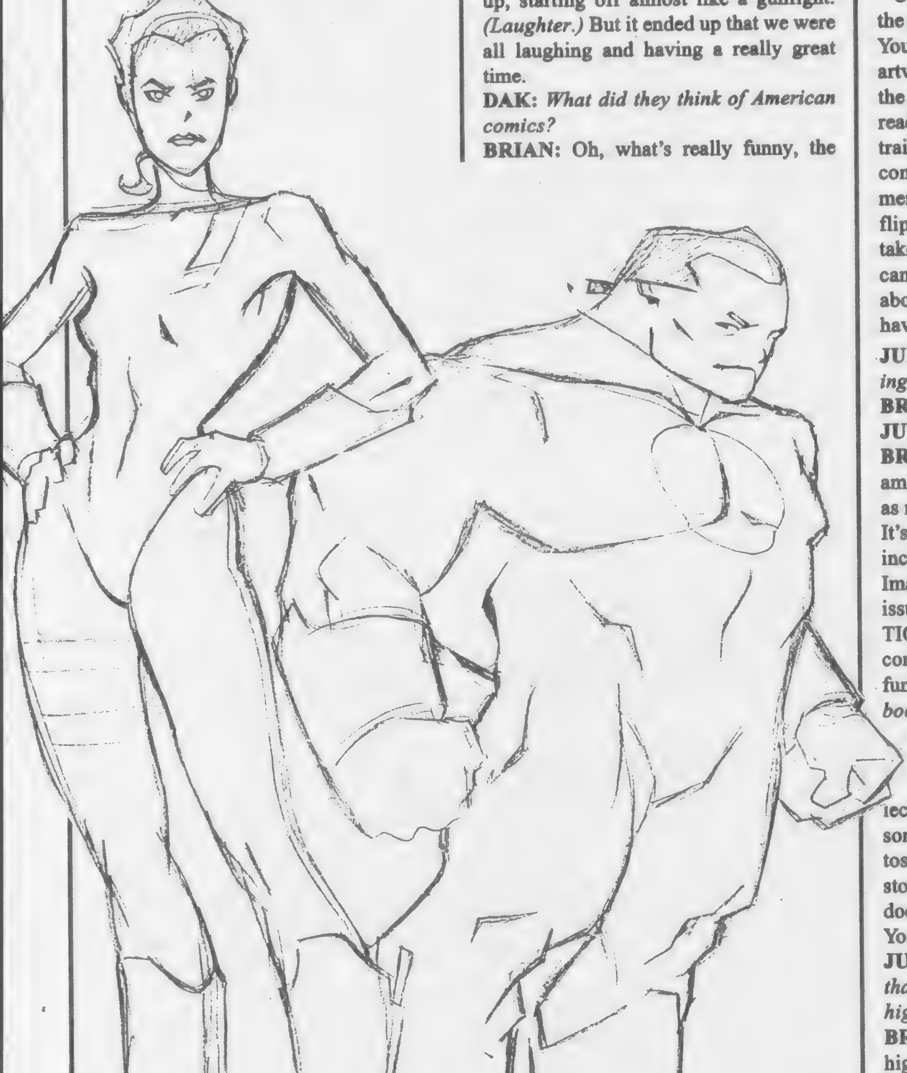
BRIAN: In Japan for about the same amount of cash, for $1.75 or $2.00, maybe as much as $3.00, you get a phone book. It's something that's often more than an inch thick. And it's anthology stories. Imagine getting an issue of X-MEN, an issue of BATMAN, an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, sort of ten different issues of comics in this one phone book. And the funny thing about it is when I say "*phone book*" I'm not kidding; it's the size of a phone book. And the quality of the paper is the same, you know. It's not something designed to be collected and put in a bag, it's basically something that's designed to be read and tossed away. Given that, you have a lot of stories in there for your $3.00, but it doesn't take long to read the whole thing. You can just flip through it.

JULIA: *But the thing is, they can keep that cost down because the volume is so high?*

BRIAN: Yeah, because the volume is so high, and they don't have to spend that much — I mean, the printing is *amazing* because they have government subsidized printing. But the paper is incredibly cheap newsprint type paper.

JULIA: *And they do a lot of reprint material, they keep a lot of stuff in print.*

BRIAN: Yeah, they do, a lot of reprint material. What's really funny, imagine if



Stelfreeze simplifies Val and Tanaka of CYCOPS (see painting on preceding spread for comparison). These characters just beg to be animated!

team to come in. The creator finishes up.”

you will an American comic-book artist gets a contract to do X-MEN, basically he's told he gets to do a year on X-MEN and then maybe we'll renew the contract next year. So, you've got a year, you produce a book a month and that's it and everything's cool. Over in Japan a Japanese comic-book artist will get a call to do a year of comics and that's a job that takes a month.

DAK: (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Yeah! He's told, basically, “We want one of your stories. Create a character for us.” He creates a character, he goes back to his studio, his studio generally has a team of 20 other artists, and they produce 400 pages in one month!

DAK: *There's a couple of interesting things about what you've been saying. One is even though they're creator owned, and consequently you might assume it's like a purist creator — writing and drawing his own stuff completely and totally — in fact these creators have studios that are filled with lots of people who are helping to produce this stuff?*

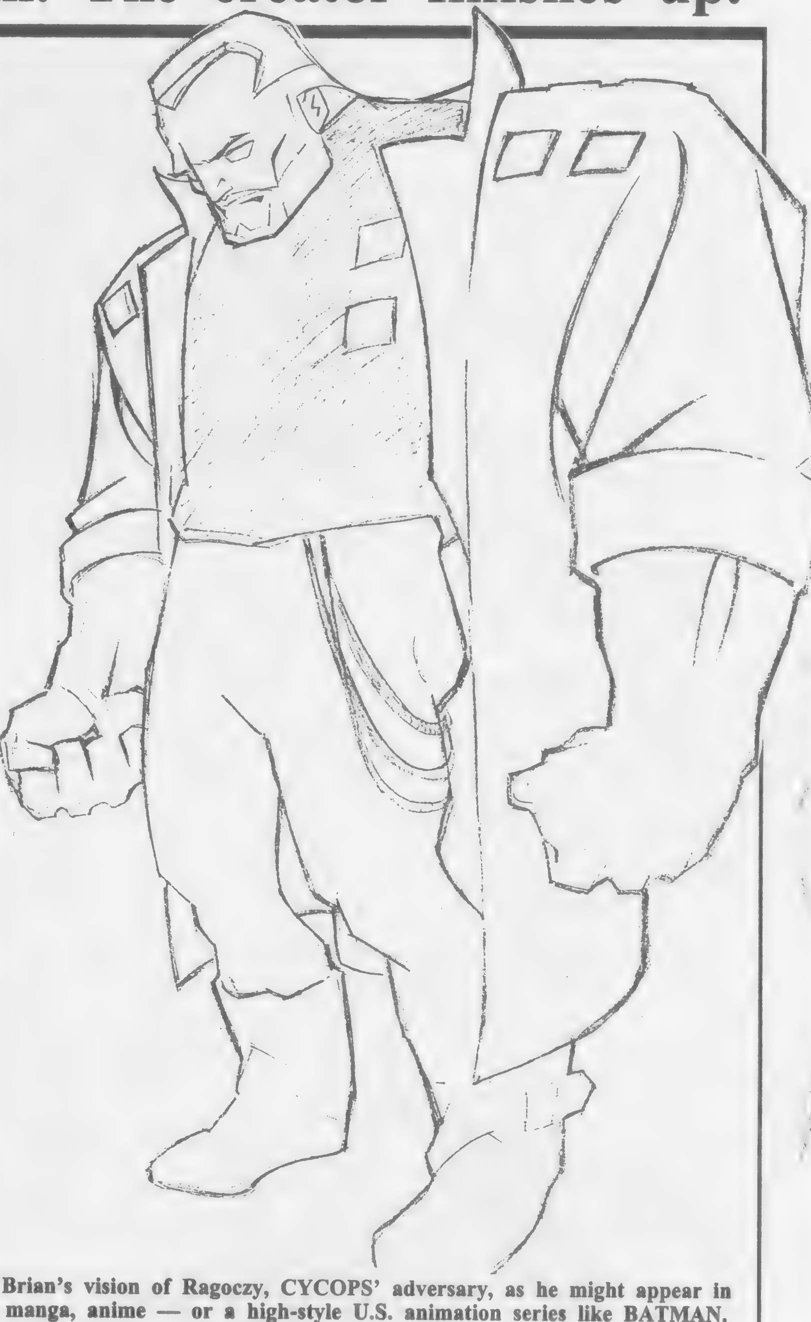
BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *So actually it's like the character is created by the creator, he retains copyright on it, but he then allows whoever to actually draw it under his tutelage.*

BRIAN: Yeah, basically. As far as the creator is concerned, we're talking about someone who might lay out the pages then get a team to come in, one guy does backgrounds, one guy does the left hand, one guy does this thing. Then the creator comes in and finishes up everything and makes sure that everything is just right to his specifications. And there's another person, you know, who does the lettering, everything like that.

DAK: *So, in some ways it's even more assembly line than here, and in other ways it's like the Old Masters system.*

BRIAN: Yeah, it is. It's a little bit like us but then a little bit not like us. But the creator is whoever he wants to be, you know. If the creator wants to hire a warehouse full of art students to help him, that's great. But if the creator is just a person on his own, there are people like that, one guy coming up with his own ideas and drawing the stories, doing everything himself. The company isn't concerned with who the creator is, the company is concerned with doing the project. So, you have some people over there that when they get a job to do a year of comics, that job is a month's worth of work for them. They'll produce the next year of X-MEN, but they will produce it next month, and it'll be however many hundreds of pages, then that comic will be serialized one month at a time.



Brian's vision of Ragoczy, CYCOPS' adversary, as he might appear in manga, anime — or a high-style U.S. animation series like BATMAN.

DAK: *Sometimes in our less forgiving moods, when our European friends aren't actually on hand, we laugh at the fact that they stir themselves to produce entire 20- or 30- page stories once a year.* (Laughter.) *From our point of view it's like: What are they doing the rest of the time? We Americans tend to think of ourselves as the guys who really produce comics. But from what you're saying, what must the Japanese think of the European method where people sometimes produce a page or two a month?*

BRIAN: Yeah. They really put it out, you know. And the neat thing is that's got to be tough on the publisher, because basically they have a whole month to really nag this guy to get his pages in. *(Laughter.)* But you're expecting somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 pages a *day* from this guy. With American comic-book publishers you have less pressure on you but they get to bug you for the whole year. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *So we're actually in between the*

“Comics are completely mainstream in Ja-

European and Japanese methods.

BRIAN: It's a little bit of both. And the artists, or creators — it's kind of funny saying “artist” — it's almost sort of a bragging right. To them I'm, like, a lowly American artist who produces two or three pages a week, so they laugh at me and point their fingers and say, “Haw, two pages a week, I do 400 pages a month!” Then someone else will say, “Haw, 400, I do 600 pages a month!” At first I was thinking, “Wow, one guy, that many pages a month? He must be cookin'!” *(Laughter.)*

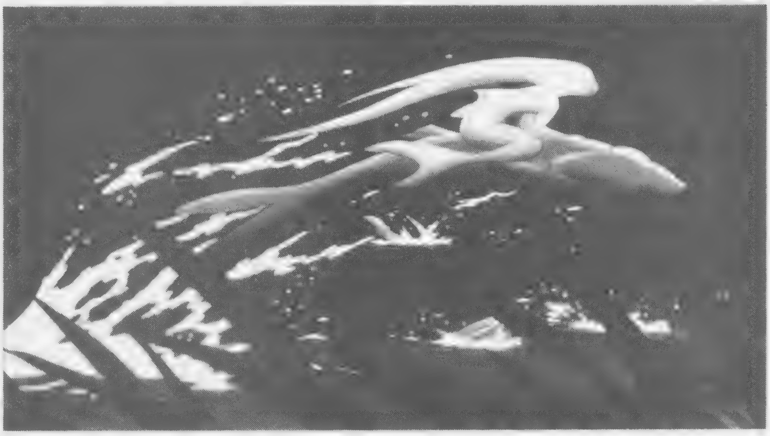
JULIA: *But here it's somewhat frowned upon, people will say, “Haw, he had an assistant on that strip.” From our perspective looking at this Japanese product it's, “That isn't really his work, he has 20 people doing it all for him.” It's frowned upon here in some circles, sort of passing off your assistants' work as your own under your name.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *But they don't have that stigma.*

BRIAN: Right. It's really strange. People are under the impression that, like, **Leonardo Da Vinci** did every brush stroke on the wall; it's a rude awakening when they find out his assistants did a lot of “The Last Supper.” But really, the Japanese, they are efficient; they are really super efficient at getting the job *done.*

DAK: *I remember right after you came back from Japan hearing the two of you saying how the comic-book publishers do market studies and attempt to* expand *the market, that they will invest in things even though they may not make any money from it.*



STINE: Well, there was a comment made when we left the publishers meeting, **Will Eisner** wondered what they were after, did they just want a piece of our pie. Our translator, **Fred Schodt,** said, “No, they could *have* your pie.” *(Laughter.)* They had already looked into completely buying out Marvel Comics and they had decided *not* to do it because it was not a big enough market.

BRIAN: The meeting that we had, the big comic book publishers were all at this meeting. They were all interested in what these American artists and creators had to say about comics. They often do that, they have a get together once every couple of months.

JULIA: *The shared wisdom thing?*

BRIAN: Yeah. The big Japanese comic-book producers get together and they talk about comics. Imagine Marvel, DC, Dark Horse and Image getting together once every couple of months to basically say, “What's wrong with the comic-book industry and what can we do about it?” Not only that but then that group deciding on things, like one person saying there aren't enough comics being produced for kids the age of four and then the group deciding Marvel needs to start producing comics for kids the age of four, then Marvel saying okay — even though they'll lose money on that — saying okay because it will help the comicbook industry.

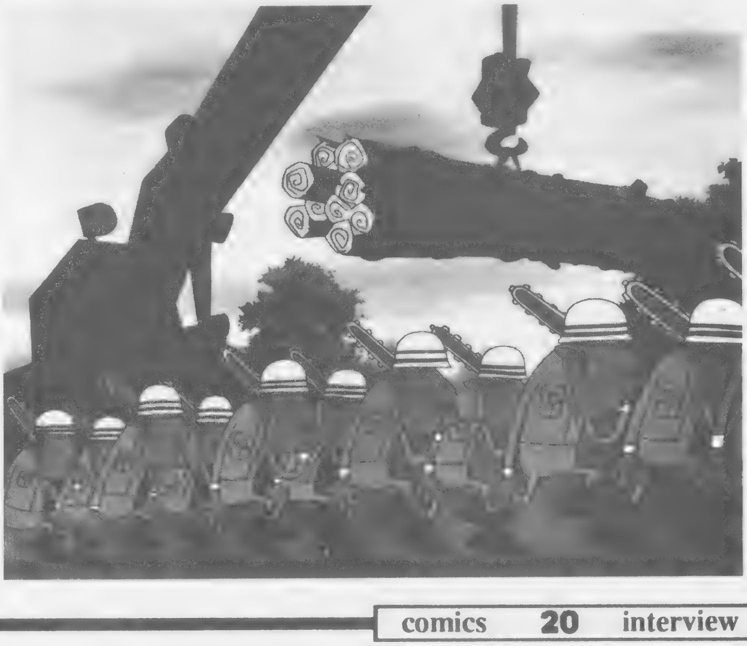
DAK: *The purpose of that is to develop a market for comics?*

STINE: They can afford to do that because comics are completely mainstream in Japan — there are comics for everyone.

BRIAN: What's really funny, we look at the American comic-book market, and the Japanese comic-book market basically was the American comic-book market like 40 years ago. The market was exactly the same, you know; comics were mostly sold to kids that were from the age of eight to sixteen, that was their comic-book market. Really, a couple of the translators were saying that a number of years ago if you were reading a comic you had that same sort of stigma of people going, “You're an adult and you're reading a comic?”

But what happened — and I think it needs to happen here but so far no one's really made a move on it — the comic-book producers a number of years ago in Japan got together and decided to actively change the image of comics, and they did. They came up with a plan and they executed that plan, and that took maybe ten years to come to fruition, but they actually did it.

Now, comics are considered like books in Japan, anyone can pick up a comic and they're not laughed at. You could walk up to just about any kid and ask to see their comic book, they'll reach into their book bag and pull out their comic book. You can walk up to almost any businessman



pan — there are comics for everyone.”

and ask what was the last comic book he read, and he'll *tell* you what the last comic book was that he read. *Everyone* reads comics. The comic-book industry got together and carved that opinion of comics.

JULIA: *That's a pretty tall order, to sit down and say we're going to change the way the whole nation perceives us.*

STINE: Yeah.

BRIAN: Yeah, but it's possible, it's possible. But the thing about it is you have to really do your demographics, and you have to really *think* about what message you're getting across. And now, for instance — they set that in motion a number of years ago and it's something that's still working for them today. Now you have people saying women are treated really bad in comics, so all the Japanese comic-book producers — when it comes time for that meeting, someone will say, “People are saying women are really treated bad in comics. What are we going to do about this?” Everyone will gear down on women being treated badly in comics so that they don't upset women and stop women from reading comics, because that will set up that same thing they worked to change.

JULIA: *So, everything about comics is marketing strategy?*

BRIAN: Yeah. All the publishers will decide in general women are being treated bad, so they will *all* back up a little bit. It's not one company saying they won't treat women bad.

DAK: *But how does that translate from our point of view, from the Western individual point of view, with creator-owned characters? Here are companies that don't actually own the characters deciding women will henceforward be treated thusly, how does that translate back up the chain to the creators who are actually doing the books?*

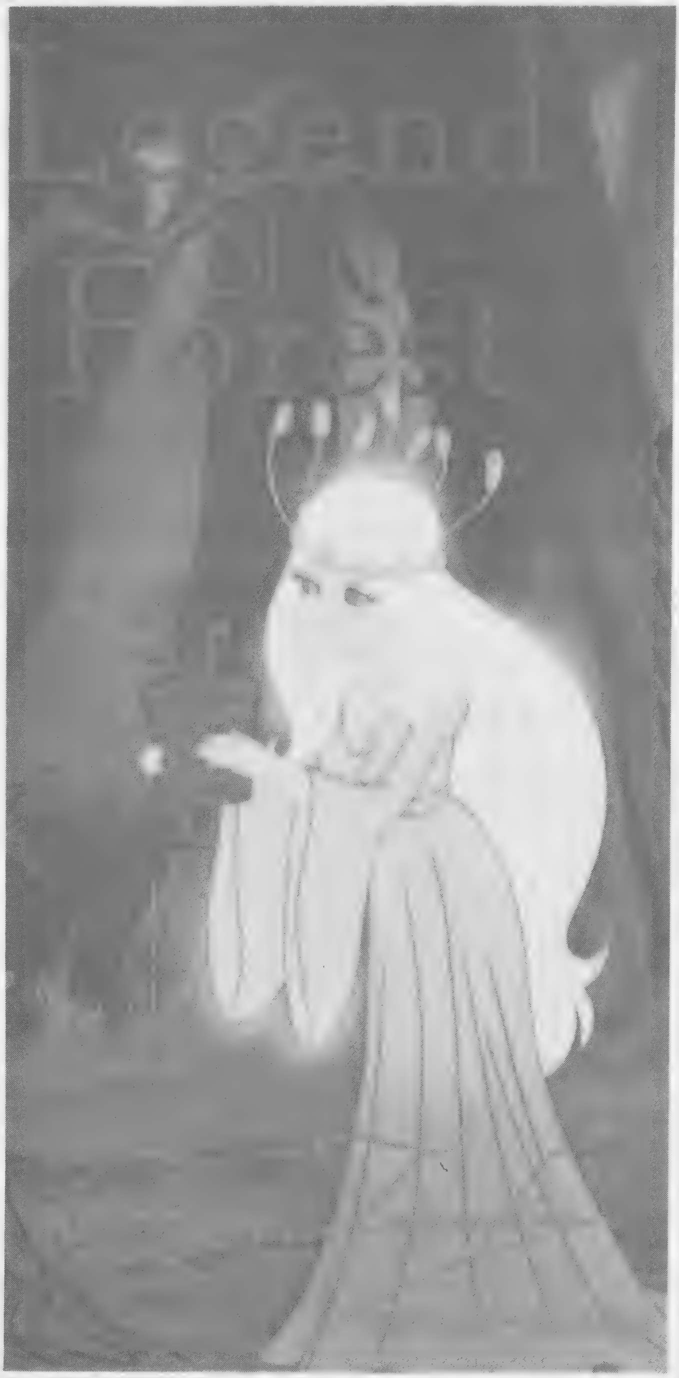
BRIAN: They call the shots. They don't tell the creators what to do, but basically they say —

JULIA: *The strategy this month is back off on women being abused?*

BRIAN: Yeah. And it's not like this month, it's like next year, you know. They will basically say they want you to do this job, create a character within these parameters. And the creators agree, “Good, I'll just do that.” It's not like, “In your book we don't want you to do this anymore.” It's, “When you do this thing for us, this is what we want.” And the creators have no problem with that.

JULIA: *There's no deciding I want to do what I want to do with my character, you won't tell me what to do or I'll go to another publisher — all the publishers are going to say the same thing to him because it's the general publishing decision of the year.*

BRIAN: And in general the creator is being asked for a job. Like right now if Marvel asked me to do a WOLVERINE mini-series, I can't do a WOLVERINE mini-series and put Batman in there and say my creative artistic integrity forces me to put Batman in this WOLVERINE



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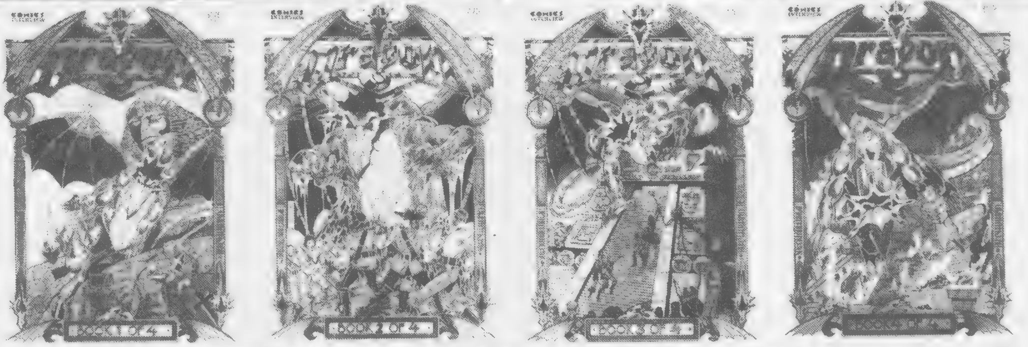
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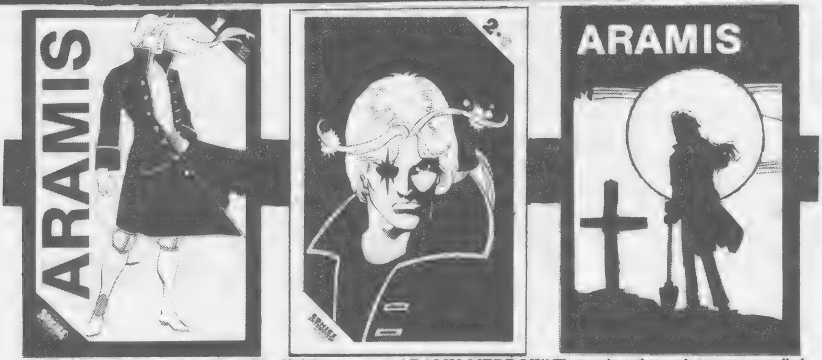
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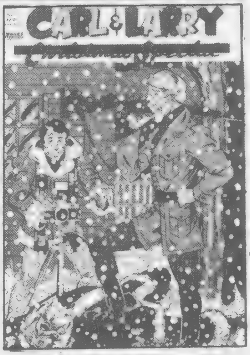

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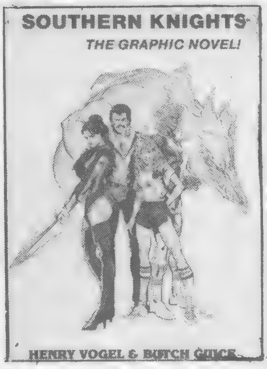
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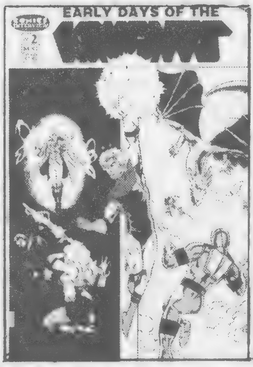
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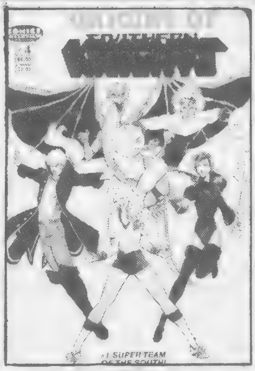

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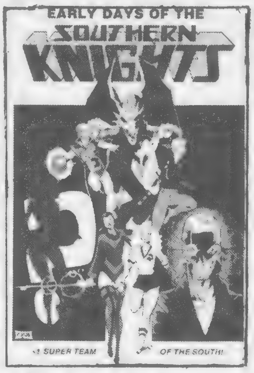
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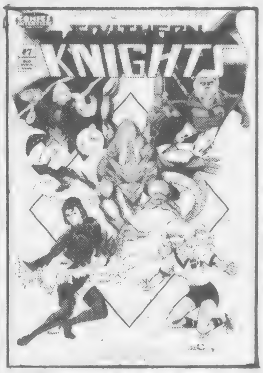

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"I think it's a cool system because it's unified."

comic and Marvel can't change that. *(Laughter.)* I can't do that. So they are not stepping on creators' toes; they are basically saying to the creators, "We want you to do a job for us; we want the job to fall within these parameters." The creator can decide to do the job or not do the job.

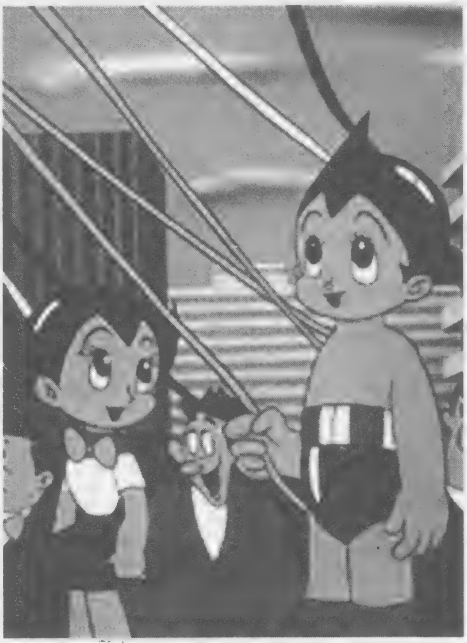
JULIA: *Like when you do a cover, you look at the script as the parameters for this cover. You're not going to put pink Martians on it if the actual story is about green ants?*

BRIAN: Yeah, yeah. And I think it's a really cool system, especially because it's a unified system. In America you have to *trip* over a comic. If you're a kid growing up in America, you have to go out of your way, you have to be in that dank corner of the Seven-Eleven, you have to walk down the book aisle of the grocery store — and what's a kid doing walking down the book aisle of the grocery store? You really have to go out of your way to get to a comic, you know. To get to a comic-book shop, that requires a special trip all on its own.

JULIA: *Yeah.*

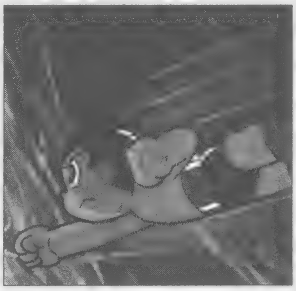
BRIAN: But with the Japanese, they have got it set up to where you can't *miss* comics. And I don't mean you can't miss comic books, you *can't miss comics*. In, say, a magazine like COSMOPOLITAN or VOGUE there might be a comic panel-to-panel page sequence on how to apply your makeup or how to give yourself a breast examination or how to do whatever. But it's done panel-to-panel comic-book style. And the neat thing is most of the comic-book producers — this is what makes the whole house of cards really fit into place — most of the big comic-book producers are actually the big magazine producers. Take Time-Warner Communications. Time-Warner owns DC Comics, but the only place that they produce comics is DC Comics. If Time-Warner were to go to some of the *other* magazines that they produce — and they produce a *lot* of magazines — and put comic-book inserts in them, what ends up happening is your primary source of getting information becomes comic books, becomes a comic-book format, so now when you see an actual comic book with a story in it you're not looking at it thinking it's for kids, because you just made your cake from a comic-book panel-to-panel sequential progression.

JULIA: *Right. Or, say they produce GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, say they have comic book panels showing you: Whisk in three eggs, squeeze in two lemons. I have some Japanese cookbooks and they actually have that. It's all done with panels.*



Earlier classic Osamu Tezuka animation that shaped the face of all Japanimation that followed: ASTRO BOY.

BRIAN: So then when you find a story done in a comic-book panel-to-panel sequential progression, you realize it's just like when you baked the cake. You already understand the format; you already understand word balloons and stuff like that. You have no problem reading the story and it's not something specifically for kids anymore; it's something that's for everyone. And everything is in position for the Americans to do it, but the Americans *aren't* doing it.



JULIA: *Well, one of the things that has happened here is the American perception of comic books has changed a little bit, I think — you know, you would pick up a comic book when maybe you should have been doing your homework, and your mother would call your comic books pieces of trash, that's the way it used to be. Not now. I recently gave a lecture at one of the schools, my tag line was: If you can get your child off his video games, get him reading a comic book, he's* reading. *The electronic toys have become the baddies now, and comic books, because they actually require reading, exercising reading skills, are now* good *things. And that's something that I think will make comic books more respectable in the eyes of the people that are trying to give an education.*

DAK: *But that pertains to your trip, Japan faces exactly all those things — in fact, aren't they* purveying *all of these electronic games? And yet, their comic-book industry* isn't *dwindling, doesn't seem to be in crisis. How are they gearing for preserving the comic-book market, or enlarging it, in the face of all the same temptations we face over here.*

BRIAN: It works out perfect for them because . . . the cheapest place to buy Japanese electronics is here in America.

DAK: *Really?*

BRIAN: Yeah. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Not there?*

BRIAN: Yeah, not there, here. This is great for the comic-book producers. I have a choice, as a Japanese kid, where I can spend $100 on a Nintendo game, then $50 or $60 for cartridges, actually even more than that — *or* I can spend $1.75 to $3.00 on a comic book. What do you think I'm going to go for, you know? I'm going to go for the comic book all of the time. Every other form of entertainment is *much* more expensive than a comic book;

“Buying a comic is cheaper than food. It’s really taught

every other form of entertainment is at least a thousand times more expensive than a comic book.

DAK: *Is that also true of video tapes and rentals?*

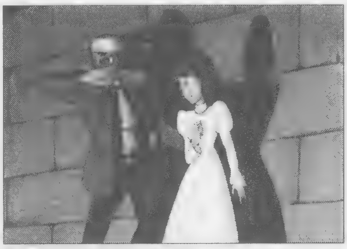
BRIAN: Video tapes, rentals, everything. To go to a movie, it was like $20 for us to go see a movie in a theater.

STINE: And there was almost nobody in the theater.

BRIAN: Yeah. I can go to that movie for $20 or I can buy that comic for $3.00, so naturally I’m going to buy that comic if I want to be entertained real cheaply, you know. Buying a comic is cheaper than buying an apple, it’s cheaper than buying food, so it’s like the comic-book market is absolutely preserved.

DAK: *So, what did this do to your American perception of our comics being on top-quality paper and so on? For years it was like “our comics are crap, if only we had ultra high production values and super great paper and so on in the European mode then our comics would be respectable.” Isn’t this all the opposite?*

BRIAN: It’s really taught me something about comics. I think the American market and maybe the European market — with the Europeans, they produce really high end cars and everything that’s really super expensive with maybe the best materials — we’re *doing* that, but we’re doing that with *comic books*. In actuality, when you think about it, what is a comic book? A comic book is just a story, you know. I think we could just go back to producing comics like, for instance, the first ACTION COMICS, which is worth so much money now. That comic book was produced with some of the *cheapest* paper in the *world!* It’s worth a lot because somebody decided to hold onto it; the comic-book collectors’ market is accidental. It just so happened that someone *kept* that cheap comic book, you know. Now, the first thing about collecting *anything* is if someone says it’s a collectible chances are it’s not. *(Laughter.)*



Above: LUPIN III by the mysterious, mirthful “Monkey Punch”(Hayao Miyazaki) — also known for TOTORO and, of course, NAUSICAA.

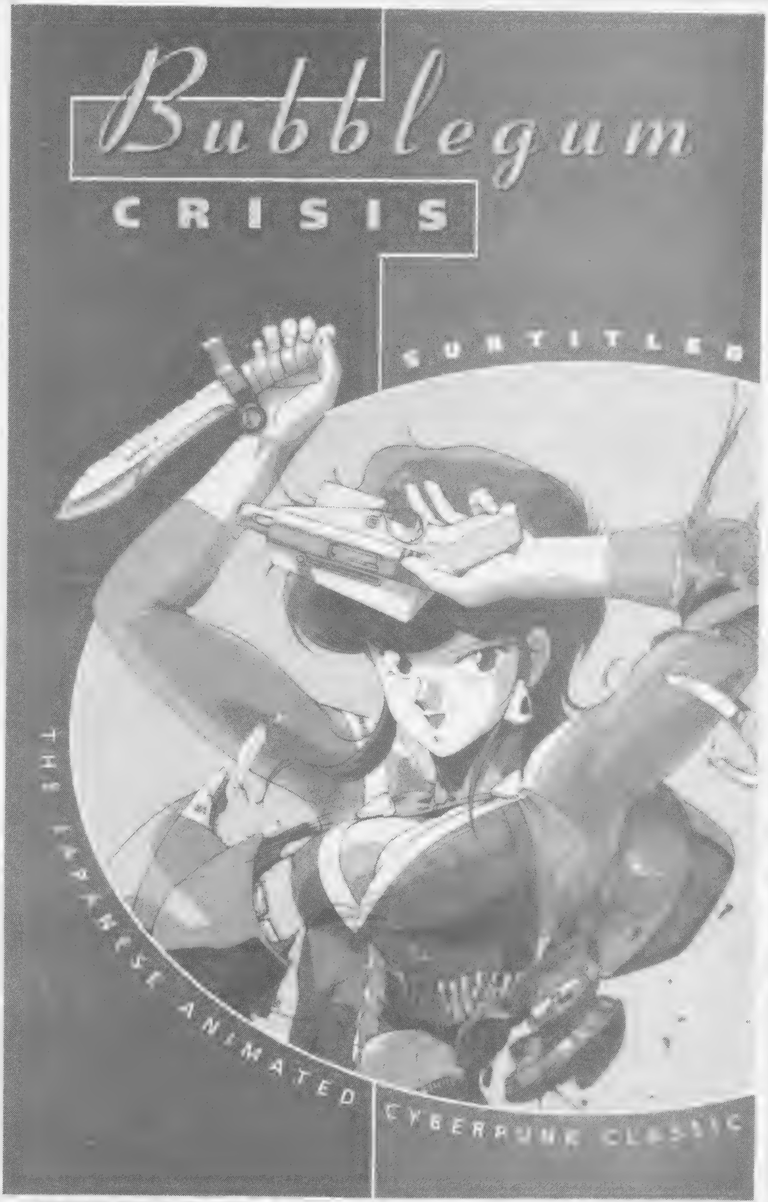
DAK: *Yeah.*

BRIAN: I think producing comics on really high-quality acid-free paper with gold foil stamping and whatever, it’s not necessary, you know. If you’re just interested in getting a story across you could print it on toilet paper, the story’s there and you could read it once. *(Laughter.)* I think that that’s really a smart way to produce comics. If the main thing is the story that’s being produced, that’s it and it should be able to be done incredibly cheap. The first American comic-book producer that says he’s going to produce the best work on the cheapest paper that he can lay his hands on, bring the price down to $1.00 or whatever so then *anybody* can buy this, it might take awhile before he starts making money, but when he does he’s going to be rolling in it.

Keep the quality in the work but make it something that anyone can buy, that’s what the Japanese comics are. There *isn’t* a collectors market over there. The cool thing about the collectors market is after these books have been published, after these phone books have been published, it’s just trash, just tons and tons of paper. But you can write in to all of the comic-book companies and if they get a lot of letters for a particular story then they will reprint that story, collect them all from a year in one book that’s really nice and thick and on nicer paper with a nice cover, maybe even some gold foil stamping or whatever. But that’s only if there’s a great particular demand for that particular

Richard & Wendy Pini, Stine Walsh, and the legendary Will Eisner talk comics in Tokyo.

me something. That's a smart way to produce comics."



BUBBLEGUM CRISIS, designed by Kenichi Sonoda of GAIL FORCE and GUNSMITH CATS. RIDING BEAN is also one of Brian's favorites.

story. Otherwise, you get it and you read it and you toss it away.

DAK: *What about the animation industry over there, are they tied in with the comic-book industry at all?*

BRIAN: Yeah, they are. Not *directly* tied in with the comic-book industry, but some of the characters that are being produced as comic books, if they gain massive popularity they get produced as animation.

DAK: *Were any of the animation people at these meetings?*

BRIAN: Well, Tezuka Productions does a lot of animation, that's the company that set the whole thing up. We didn't really get a chance to deal with much of the animation end of things, but there is a *lot* of crossover. A lot of the comic-book creators are called upon to create stuff for animation.

JULIA: *I know they produce some of the American comic books, they import them directly in English and also they produce them over there translated. But do they license any of the American stuff for Japanese animation?*

BRIAN: Yeah, SPIDER-MAN.

JULIA: *They have their own animated SPIDER-MAN?*

BRIAN: Not animated, but SPIDER-MAN is produced as a Japanese comic drawn by Japanese artists. That's kind of weird to see, SPIDER-MAN in the Japanese comic-book style, real simple straightforward stuff.

DAK: *After you guys had all these meetings did they make any offers to pick stuff up? Like to license ELFQUEST or something?*

BRIAN: Not that I know of.

DAK: *When you left they didn't say things like, "Brian, even though we don't do painted covers, do us a painted cover."* (Laughter.)

STINE: They were interested in having **Will Eisner** do something.

BRIAN: Yeah, they were. But again, they're *really* interested in producing new stuff specifically for the Japanese market. A person like me, I couldn't work in that market because the stuff that I do is: *Haw*, leave your culture behind and go on a trip with me! So that's really different stuff for them.

JULIA: *I guess they appeal to a larger mass audience. Most 45-year-old housewives would not be interested in SPIDER-MAN.* (Laughter.) *Most 55-year-old businessmen would not be interested in SANDMAN.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *The market caters to the people who are already reading comics instead of trying to break that barrier down a little bit.*

BRIAN: But the stuff that **Will Eisner** does, I believe Kodansha basically wanted **Will Eisner** to produce some stories *for* them, Japanese-style **Will Eisner** stories.

JULIA: *A lot of the stuff that he does is very similar to that, with general population themes — THE TENEMENT and things like that.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *Well, after you had your first, like, Gunfight at the OK Corral* — (Laughter.) *Then what happened? How long were you there?*

BRIAN: The whole thing took four or five days — *their* plan for us took about four or five days. The first few days were basically meeting with artists, meeting with publishers, then going over to a comic-book company — it was kind of neat because it was like step-by-step taking us through the entire production of a Japanese comic.

STINE: Publishing.

BRIAN: Yeah. So, it was like the first few days were spent doing that, then the last days that we were there — since they're so proud of their culture — we went to a couple of, basically, tourist spots, just

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"The Japanese market — I couldn't work in it."

gardens and places.

STINE: They fit that in in-between meetings and things, they took us to the more traditional things like the gardens.

BRIAN: We got to ride on the Shinkansen.

STINE: Yeah, they took us on the bullet train. They squeezed so many things in that you'd have to sit down and look at notes to remember it all.

BRIAN: And one of our last days there we went to the **Tezuka** Museum.

STINE: Tells his life story.

BRIAN: Yeah, and shows his characters, and it has a couple of really neat things for kids to play around with. And from there we went back and had a final dinner. The **Eisners** and the **Pinis** took off, and Stine and I — because we'd never been to Japan before — decided to spend an extra week there just kind of hanging out seeing things.

JULIA: *What did you do there for your extra week?*

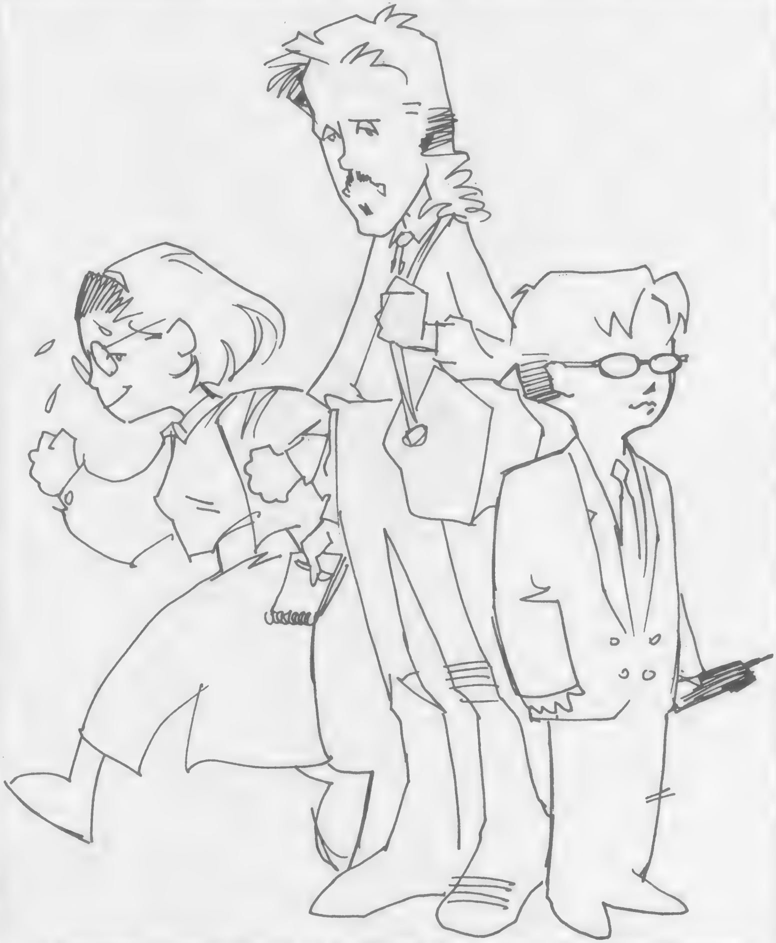
STINE: Well, Brian and I, we were ready for a little adventure. They were kind of upset about us shopping without a translator, but we were like, "Let's hit the streets, let's walk around, let's see how many different areas of Tokyo we can get to." So that's what we would spend our days doing. We went to the Metropolitan Museum. Or we just would find a park or something that would be interesting, find out *how* to get there and then get there on our own, which was kind of like our objective. You know, find a way to eat and everything and then come back to our hotel — which they were very *shocked* about.

But we would just pick a certain thing, like Brian wanted to go to one area of Tokyo that's nothing but electronics stores, so we did that. We spent one day going to nothing but book stores, buying books for friends and just seeing what their book stores were like. We spent one day just going to art supply stores, checking out everything that they had, seeing what we could get there that we couldn't get in the States. Just certain things that we were specifically interested in.

DAK: *What about, from your perspective as somebody who is interested in painting — not just in comics — were you able to assimilate anything?*

STINE: Yeah, actually, and I've already done *several* paintings from things that we photographed there, the gardens and things like that, you know. You'd have no idea of what it *really* looks like unless you went there.

DAK: *What about their cultural take on some of this stuff?*



A Stelfreeze quick sketch of animated associates, translator Tomoko Kanai, author/coordinator Fred Schodt and Tezuka director Yoshihiro Shimizu.

"If Japan is a scarier place than the world makes it out to be, we'll find out."

STINE: That's strange, it's hard to get a really good feel for it because there's a certain *distance* there. You know it's there; they're very friendly, but it's just like to a certain level. It's very hard to pick up. There are things that are *often* misunderstood by very many Americans when they go over there, because they're *constantly* giving you gifts and showering you with things, but that's just their *culture,* it's not anything to do with —

JULIA: *It is fairly superficial?*

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Well, I don't know if you could — I mean, it could *look* that way from *our* view, but for *them* that's the way you *do* things; it's not about whether they mean it sincerely or not, it's polite. It's *necessary* for them, you know.

BRIAN: That's one of the reasons why we spent a couple of extra days, is because we knew that we were being wined and dined and shown the *best* of Japan.

STINE: Yeah, so it was nice to just go to the park and see bums. *(Laughter.)* Hey, they've got 'em, too.

“I read Kenichi Sonoda’s GUNSMITH CATS,

BRIAN: Yeah. It was really good to sort of *be* the ugly American, you know, and just kind of roam around Japan, and if we got mugged on the train then we could say, “Don’t get on the trains because you’ll get mugged.” But, like, we were expecting the unexpected; we just basically went there and said, “Okay, whatever happens, happens.” You know, we were going to *try* to play it safe, but if Japan is a scarier place than the world makes it out to be, we’ll find out. But it just so happens that it *wasn’t.*

STINE: They were very surprised that we were not intimidated, “You don’t *need* a translator?” “Well, no, we’ll just take our little dictionary. If we don’t understand, then we don’t understand.” Just see what you can see on your own.

JULIA: *Right, it’s much more fun.*

STINE: We went to a store that was nothing but very traditional art supplies, that was *really* fascinating. I had my *hanko* made there, and these people spoke no English whatsoever. That’s a stamp of my name in Japanese like they use for signatures. They figured out everything! It took a little while but it was *fun!* It was a great interchange because they were so pleased that I would want to do this, spend the time *trying* to figure out a way of communicating with them. They were very eager to help, so that’s a nice exchange, when people are just being people. And they tell you what your name means.

JULIA: *Would you like to go back?*

STINE: Yeah, I’d go back.

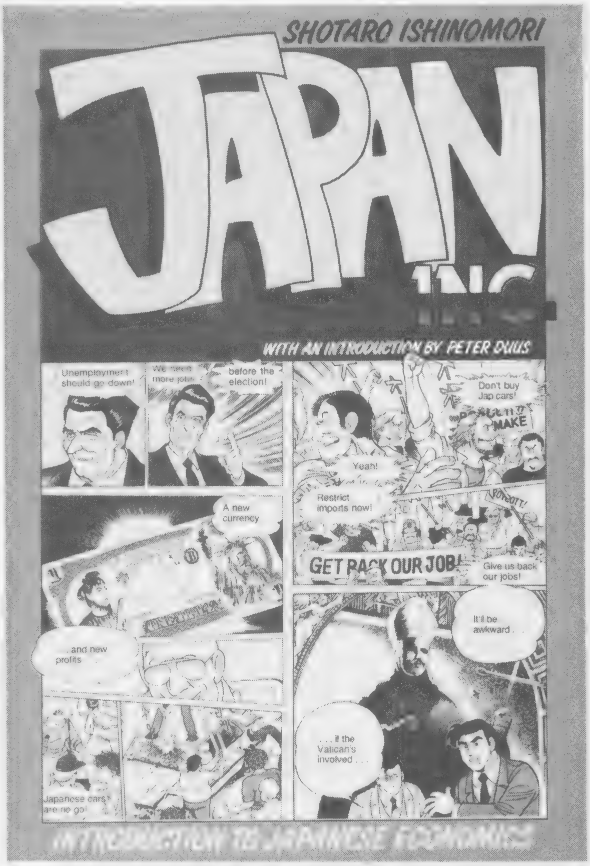
BRIAN: We’d like to go back, but the funny thing about it is for us to go back and do what we did would take much more money than we could afford. Like, where we stayed was really valuable real estate, like staying at the most popular area, the hotel was super expensive.

JULIA: *I was there in the ’80s and when you told me you were going I thought about that — it really is expensive, it*

AKECHI
AKECHI MOTORS

Art from APPLESEED, by Masamune Shirow — published in America by Dark Horse Comics.

and Masamune Shirow's APPLESEED.”



IN WHICH we see how international trade friction grates on the affairs of the Toyosan Automobile Corporation and its affiliate, the Mitsutomo Company:

U.S. automobile interests force Japanese companies to restrict the export of cars, and Toyosan's president decides to move production to the U.S.;

Mitsutomo's wily Tsugawa is called upon to eradicate union opposition to the move and facilitate the takeover of a plant in the U.S.;

Toyosan's union leader Sato discovers that his personal predilections and political ambitions prevent the pursuit of union interests;

and Mitsutomo's kind-hearted Kudo learns much about earlier trade-friction crises, but is unable to save the Japanese subcontractors who have been manufacturing parts for Toyosan cars.

American translation of Japanese business comics mentioned earlier in interview. From JAPAN INC., An Introduction to Japanese Economics, by Shotaro Ishinomori, translated by Betsy Scheiner.

really is.

STINE: But they wouldn't let us spend any money, it was really frustrating. If we wanted to treat them to dinner, no, that was *not* going to happen.

BRIAN: They would get pretty upset about that.

STINE: We did spend a day with **Takayuki Matsutani** and his daughter, which is kind of unusual. Brian and I were invited to go to a barbecue, a company barbecue, and we met his daughter.

JULIA: *That's quite an honor.*

STINE: Yes, and that was fun. She didn't speak any English but we had a great time just doing simple things like going out in the field picking flowers, just being people.

BRIAN: It just so happened that we were there, the whole meeting was right before this national holiday, like a day off for everyone. We just went out to this park, and it wasn't formal at all. **Matsutani,** the president of Tezuka Productions, who is *normally* a suit-and-tie guy, he shows up and he's got on a jacket and a comfortable pair of pants. And we were just kind of hanging out with him, you know!

STINE: Yeah. He was enjoying the day with his child, so that was a totally different aspect of his personality.

BRIAN: But it was really neat. And even doing stuff like that helps you. I could not get a grasp of, like, why are these comics about fishing so important to the Japanese. But then when we went to the park, you know, there's, like, this little creek that *surely* had no *fish* in it, but people were out there with their fishing poles.

STINE: We went to the largest lake in Japan and there were people fishing all over the place.

BRIAN: And the neat thing about it is catching fish has *nothing* to do with what they're doing, it was just really fun for them to go out and throw a line in the water — and we don't even know if there were hooks on the lines! *(Laughter.)* It was just the *act* of fishing, you know; just sitting there talking with your friends, stuff like that, *that* was massively important.

STINE: And there were all kinds of signs with little pictograms about where to go, everywhere you went there were little visuals about what was the best way to do things. Where you couldn't go, they weren't signs like we would have: DO NOT ENTER — they were little *pictograms!*

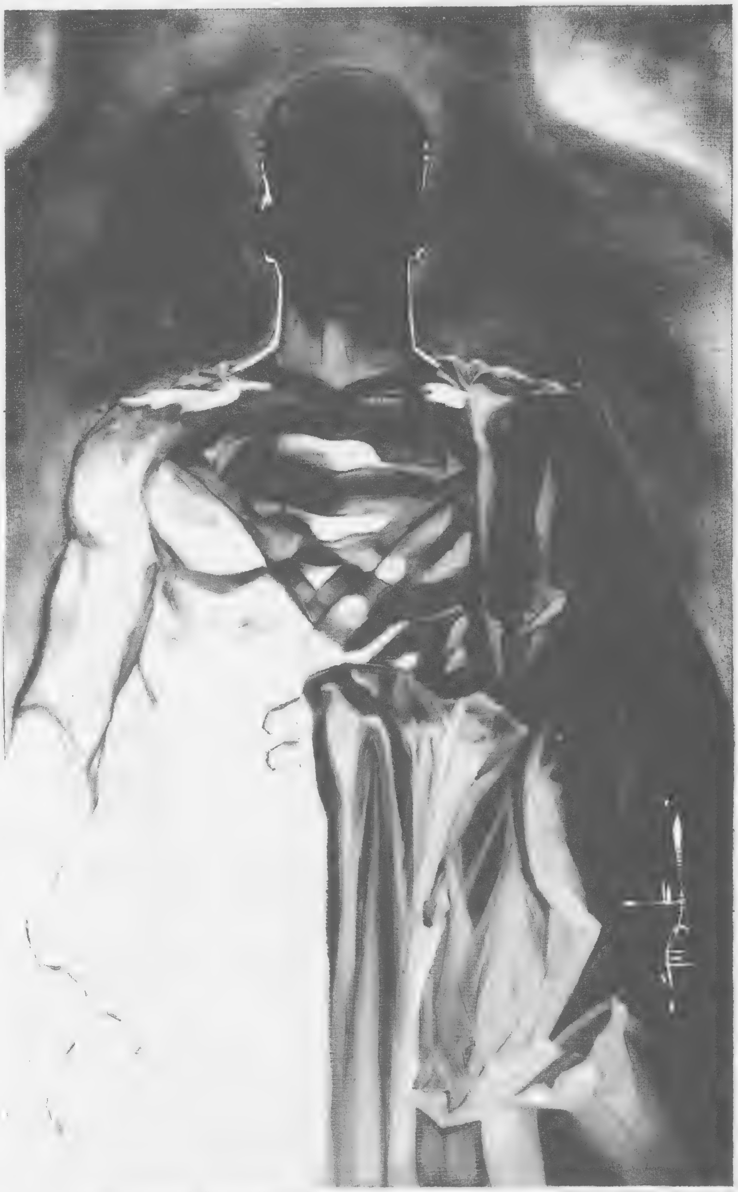
BRIAN: Little Japanese comic-book panels, you know, showing that this is where you go to fish, this is where you want to park your car, stuff like that. Even in the hotel room; there was this Japanese tub set-up *but* we had this little pictogram showing us how to take a bath, so we were able to figure that out. It was a pretty cool trip.

DAK: *Do you read any Japanese comics on a regular basis?*

BRIAN: Yeah, I read **Kenichi Sonoda's** GUNSMITH CATS, and I also read **Masamune Shirow's** APPLESEED. That's really good stuff. It's kind of funny, but I think that's sort of an occasion where basically some Japanese guys are doing some American comics, but they're doing it the *right* way, really well illustrated but at the same time . . . really, just well put-together books.

DAK: *Did you discover anything while you were there? I guess you wouldn't because it's all in Japanese.*

“Manga is something *borrowed* from us,



Stunning oil painting by Stine Walsh for the cover of COMICS INTERVIEW SUPER SPECIAL: SUPERMAN. DAK owns and admires the original.

“We could learn from their unity. What’s going on with American comics is absolute disregard for unity.”

BRIAN: Yeah. I didn’t, like, *find* any brand new gems, you know. There was a lot of stuff that I had seen already, that I already knew a little bit about. I guess the biggest thing, being over there, was finding a bunch of really neat books. We went to a book store and it was really *amazing!* I guess because they’re on an island they can’t build things out, they build them up, and there was this book store that had five or six floors to it, and each floor was the size of an American book store.

We kind of walked into this book store looking for the art books, they said they were upstairs. We went to the next floor and looked around. There were great books there but we were looking for the art books, they said they were upstairs. When we finally got to the section on the art books, it was *huge* — Japanese art books, French art books, American art books, a little bit of everything. I even picked up a couple of Japanese books, like FIGURE DRAWING FOR ALL IT’S WORTH by **Andrew Loomis.** *(Laughter.)* It was something that was just so odd, all of these books that were *originally* in different languages that had been translated into Japanese; it was *great!* It was the biggest supply of art books that Stine and I had ever come across, we spent probably about $1,000 on books.

STINE: Books on Japanese Impressionists, things that you never knew about.

BRIAN: I didn’t know there was such a thing as Japanese Impressionist artists during the time of the Impressionists, you know.

STINE: Right. And good how-to art books, not quite enough to really understand but they were really well done. They’re hard to find here, you don’t find books that tell you about techniques.

BRIAN: Yeah, and that was a whole lot of fun. And it was kind of nice because Tezuka Productions and a lot of the other comic-book companies, they *gave* us a lot of their comic books, so we’ve got a *bunch.* We went there with two weeks worth of luggage and came back with a truck full of stuff. And of course we got stopped at the airport because some of their art supplies aren’t allowed on planes.

STINE: We had something that was flammable or combustible that we couldn’t get here.

JULIA: *And they took it away?*

STINE: Yeah. We didn’t realize; it took us a while to figure it out. She didn’t speak enough English —

BRIAN: Of course I was saying, “Oh, you’re going to put it somewhere else,

but it's something totally different.”

how do I get it when I get to America?” She's like, “No no, you can't take this.”

STINE: Finally we realized —

BRIAN: “Oh, you're confiscating it. I'm *losing* this, that's what's happening.” *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Getting back to the Japanese comic-book industry, they really only have disposable comic books? You talked about how they don't collect them.*

BRIAN: Yeah, as far as Japanese comics are concerned, there *isn't* a collectors' market.

STINE: They *can't* collect. There's no *room* to store a collection.

DAK: *They just throw them away?*

BRIAN: They recycle them.

STINE: There are bins at the subway stations that are just for comic books, and people come along sometimes and scrounge through those.

BRIAN: Which is really kind of nice. It would seem like, you know, a comic-book publisher is really cutting off his arm doing something like this, but they have these huge bins and after you finish reading your comic book you put it in this bin. The next person who comes along might then take that comic book and read it. But there isn't really a collectors market over there.

STINE: Only very special things.

BRIAN: Yeah. There are books that are specifically produced because if you are a big fan of this series you can get it all collected in this one book. But chances are your house is really small, you only have so much room so you can't afford to have a collection of comics. There are a bunch of guys that work with us at Gaijin Studio that have tons and tons of comics. They have no place to put them — imagine buying a telephone book every week. Pretty soon you are going to have a bunch of paper that you can't do anything with. Something that's really cool is even with this thing, even with no collectors market, even with books being tossed away and recycled, SHONEN JUMP still sells, like, four million copies a week.

STINE: What was the one book they told us sells six million?

BRIAN: SHONEN-JUMP, it sells four to six million, and they produce it every week. But their comic books are designed to be zoomed through, then you buy the next one — or you might not have to buy it because you might find it in the bin when you're walking through the subway. It's a pretty neat market; it's different from ours.

And *manga* is something that's a little bit difficult for an American to get used to. We're used to the level of detail that goes into an American comic. We have to have a *lot* of stuff; we have to have big Cadillacs, you know. An American comic has a lot of fluff and a lot of stuff to it. A Japanese comic is really stripped down; it's really efficient, just what you need and no more. In some ways I really like that. I'm an American comic-book producer and I'm not going to cut back on the amount of detail I'm putting in stuff, I'm not going to *simplify* things that much, because I think it's art, you know. As an artist I'm still going to try to show off as much as I can. But Japanese manga is something, you know, that's *borrowed* from us, but it's something that's totally different. They've taken something American and they've done something different with it, and it's something that I really appreciate.

Gaijin Studio's Stine Walsh gets to be a real gaijin in Japan.

And maybe we could learn a little bit from their unity, from what they've done, especially considering right now is a very very hard time for American comics. What's going on even more so with American comics is a complete absolute disregard for unity. People are trying very hard to cut each other's throats. That alone is destroying a large percentage of the American comic book market. But take a look at Japan — there is a fantastic unity, and within that unity they are making *trillions* of dollars.

JULIA: *Well, Marvel is kind of going for its own unity thing. It's just decided that various other companies should just* belong *to it.* (Laughter.) *Maybe Marvel will just eventually become* the *American comic-book market — when they've bought everything else, then they won't have anyone left to fight so there will be a unity.*

BRIAN: Also, what's funny about the American comic book market, is that DC Comics is actually part of this massive corporation of Time-Warner Communications. There's a lot of stuff happening in the comic-book industry and Marvel is really buzzing around and doing stuff, but everyone kind of thinks: Be careful, we don't want to wake up DC someday. *(Laughter.)* That sleeping giant might wake up and crush Marvel like a bug. But there's a lot of stuff happening, and the pie is so small that people are getting pissed off with only having a little tiny slice of it. The best thing to do is to *not* try to grab a bigger slice of the pie —

JULIA: *Make the pie bigger!*

BRIAN: Yeah, or make *more* pies. The Japanese have *done* that. If I were Marvel or DC, I probably *wouldn't* decide to make the comic book industry larger, take it on the chin and lose a lot of money making the comic book industry larger. Everyone else would wait for you to make it bigger and then jump in on it, sort of prey on it, while you spent the money, you know. It takes an incredible amount of trust.

JULIA: *Japan, as we know it today, grew out of the devastation they had after the Second World War. They suffered an annihilation that's pretty hard to even imagine. At* that *point they* had to *pool their resources to have anything at all; it changed the culture. They had to rebuild their whole entire nation, the only way that they* could *do it was in*

“We met Monkey Punch. The anima-

unity. The United States has not had that, it has grown always *out of individual strength. That's a major cultural difference.*

BRIAN: With what you were saying about the Japanese culture, everything *unified* the culture, *every* massive devastation that has taken place has gotten them to get together a little bit more. So now they *always* get together and do things. They do things as a team *always.* That's the greatest thing, and now they are in this position where not only is it . . . you will have a lot of times two Japanese companies teaming up to do something over here in the United States, you will have three or four massive corporations deciding to take down this massive corporation over in the United States or over in France or wherever. Together we can do this.

As Americans, you know, we're kind of independent and damn it, if I can't do it, it simply won't be done. And Americans to a large extent are sort of satisfied: Okay, it can't be done, I'll just be happy with what I've got. And if my little tiny piece of the pie gets smaller I'll *fight* for awhile, then pretty soon I'll give up and be happy with an even smaller piece of the pie. If a couple of companies were to do the unspeakable and get together, massive things can happen, but as Americans that's *not* what we do.

JULIA: *Except Image —*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *These creators got together, pooled their creative resources, and out of that has come —*

DAK: *But it's that strange American way of getting together — yet still being individuals.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: When that started, at the time I knew **Jim Lee**, I didn't really know any of the other guys, but I was going, “Wow, this is a great thing, they're gonna show the big boys, they're gonna *stick it* to the big boys!” And for about six months they did, they stuck it to the big boys, they really flipped the comic-book industry upside down and really slammed it to everyone. After that six month period all of the Image guys, you know — with exceptions, I'm not going to say who — they just basically decided to go ahead and do it like the big boys do. They turned to doing business the same way that the big boys do business, all of the atrocities that forced them to leave Marvel they are now doing to *their* little guys. That's the American Dream at work, you know. It's really kind of neat the way that worked out.

DAK: *Back to manga what about some of the creative people you met, what were they like? Were you able to socialize with them very much?*

STINE: We met a *bunch* of artists.

BRIAN: There's one guy that we met, we only got a chance to talk to him for a little while, and he deals primarily with animation. The animation that he does is LUPIN III.

STINE: Which we had seen before.

DAK: *And his name is?*

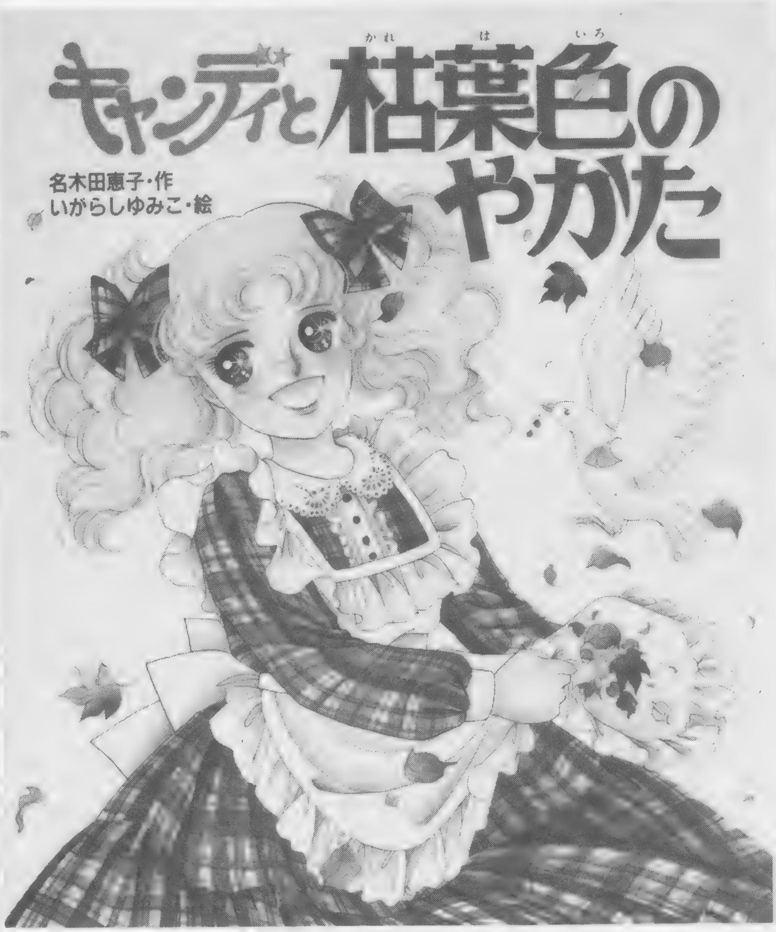
BRIAN: I don't know what his *real* name is; everyone called him **Monkey Punch.**

STINE: He's really funny.

BRIAN: Even in Japan they call him **Monkey Punch,** which is kind of weird to hear, Japanese guys nailing down a sentence in Japanese and all of a sudden you hear **“Monkey Punch.”** But he was like . . . I guess in a lot of ways like American creators. When you look at LUPIN III it's fantastic, the movement, the comedy; everything about it is just really amazing. But then when you actually talk to **Monkey Punch,** the guy who created the whole thing, you *see* it! He *is* Lupin! He's got that funny sense of humor, he's got that sort of wacky thing. He didn't know a whole lot of English, but the English that he did know just really floored me. We talked through the translator for awhile, then right when he was leaving he turned and sort of screamed across the room to me, “*Catch* You *Later,* Man!” *(Laughter.)* It was the funniest thing.

JULIA: *That's so Lupin.*

BRIAN: Yeah. That was like his little bit of English that he knew, that he was going to try out. And it was great and it was hilarious, and I showed him how to do the sort of “hang loose” thumb and pinky California sign, so that was sort of a little bit more to his English that I added on. But he was a great guy. And there were a lot of the other Japanese artists that were just *fun* people to hang out with. I mean, they were American comic-book artists; they were Japanese, they *spoke* Japanese, they lived in Japan, but in a sense you really see what **Tezuka** was talking about—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CANDY CANDY, girls' book by Keiko Nagita and Yumiko Igarashi

tion that he does is LUPIN III.”

Wendy Pini, empress of ELFQUEST, and Yumiko Igarashi, creator of CANDY CANDY, with Japanese schoolgirls.

JULIA: *Being a comic-book artist is a universal personality type.*

BRIAN: Yeah! And it was kind of funny because, you know, I wear this Jamaican hat just about everywhere I go, and when I got there everyone kept commenting about I'm just like **Tezuka** because **Tezuka** wore one of those French berets everywhere that he went. They kind of thought, “Ah, you're just like **Tezuka** because **Tezuka** wore a hat. You must be bald.” *(Laughter.)* I took off the hat and they were stunned that there was hair under it.

But *all* of these Japanese artists had their little weird quirks, sort of little odd things *about* them. There were two guys that were late for the meeting; they came into the meeting saying that they were late for the meeting because they were playing golf. To be a member of a country club over in Japan is really expensive, like unless you're a millionaire you're not going to do it, so to say you were playing golf is like saying “I'm a millionaire” but not being quite as arrogant as that. So they came into the meeting late, *probably* on purpose, saying, “Oh, we were busy playing golf.” *(Laughter.)* And it's just like an American comic-book artist to pull a stunt like that, you know. They *were,* they just had that, it was easy to pick them out as comic-book artists.

STINE: The same with **Yumiko Igarashi,** who does CANDY CANDY, a big seller in *shojo manga,* Japanese girls' comics. She was just outrageous.

BRIAN: Yeah. She went to a park with us and she's, like, super *famous* as a comic-book artist, but at the same time it's like an American comi- book artist — like **Jim Lee** is *mega famous* and if he goes to a convention he just gets swamped, and like when I go to a convention I get swamped, but if we go to the McDonald's right next to the convention center no one knows or cares about us. So we were in this park, just kind of hanging out, and she's there and she's laughing and having a good time, and our translator said to a group of Japanese schoolgirls — they were really amazed that Americans were at the park — he said to them, “This woman is the creator of CANDY CANDY.” All of these girls started going nuts, like, “Oh, man, not only are we seeing Americans, we're seeing **Yumiko Igarashi,** the creator of CANDY CANDY!”

STINE: And then he told them that **Wendy Pini** was like **Yumiko Igarashi** in the United States and they totally freaked out again.

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Then he said **Will Eisner** was like **Tezuka** and they were overwhelmed.

BRIAN: Yeah, and so they all wanted to have their picture taken with **Will Eisner.**

“LUPIN III is fantastic, the movement, the comedy, everything. The guy who created it — he *is* Lupin!”

"Japanese artists were just *fun* to hang out with."

(Laughter.) It was a whole lot of fun, hanging out and being comic-book artists in Japan — being *artists* in Japan just in general. It's kind of really funny because, like, at the same time I was in Japan and I was *learning* all of this stuff about Japanese comics and Japanese comic art and Japanese comic artists, I was learning about American comics. Every time that I've ever seen **Will Eisner** at a convention he's had a ton of people around him getting his autograph and talking to him, and this was the first time that I was able to seriously sit back and talk to **Will Eisner** about comics. Stine and I and **Will Eisner** and his wife just talking about the old days of American comics, here I was in Japan getting to meet one of the greatest American comic-book artists, *learning* about American comics, learning about the *history* of American comics. It was a total education but it was kind of funny that I had to go to Japan in order to get this.

DAK: *What else did you have to go to Japan to get?*

BRIAN: Actually, this is kind of funny. I'd heard about *fugu,* the Japanese poisonous blowfish andyou have to have a chef with skilled hands to prepare the *fugu* because if it's prepared the wrong way it could *kill* you. I just had this thought that I should say to **Matsutani,** the *president* of Tezuka Productions, that we're going to have to go out one night and have some *fugu.* The translator just *looked* at me, she gave me this "Are you sure you want me to say this to him?" look. I was kind of like, "Well, yeah, it seems like a thing to say." *(Laughter.)* So she said that to him, and he just *looked* at me.

Immediately he said he loved *fugu,* started talking about how great *fugu* is, and asked me if I'd ever had it. And I had to say no, so he first said we were just not going to be there long enough to have *fugu,* but then he found out that we were going to be staying an extra week, and actually *fugu* was going to come in season within the time of that extra week. He was like, "Oh, we're *definitely* going to have to have *fugu!"* I was like: Oh, man, I've shoved my foot down my throat now. *(Laughter.)* So one of the last days we were there he took us to this *fugu* restaurant. They have a chef with these skilled hands to be able to prepare and serve *fugu.*

American comics *auteur* and living legend Will Eisner with Takayuki Matsutani, president of Tezuka Productions.

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“ANPANMAN probably meant as much to us as it

It was an experience!

STINE: It was good.

BRIAN: Just really something amazing.

JULIA: *So, you liked the fugu?*

BRIAN: Yeah, yeah! The *fugu* was fantastic.

DAK: *Isn't there, though, a limit on how much of it you can eat?*

BRIAN: Yeah, but the *fugu* is the fish; the poisonous part is the liver. The reason why fugu has a limited season is because that's the only time where the liver isn't poisonous enough to kill you, but it's still poisonous enough to kill you if you eat too much of it. So, like, we're getting this education on fugu, the guy is preparing it, so he whips out the liver and says, “This is the poisonous part of the *fugu*.” Then he cuts it up and puts it in a bowl, puts it on the table, and I'm like, “Okay . . . What?” He's like, “Well, you can *eat* it.” He looks at everyone and tells everyone that they can have this much, and he looks over at Stine, who is the smallest person at the table, and he says, “You can have two pieces. And that's it; you can't have any more.” So, it's really weird sitting there thinking, “Man, I hope this guy knows what he's talking about.” *(Laughter.)* If he doesn't, you know, we're not going to make it home. But it was great. And of course as soon as you eat it you realize you're eating poison. You can feel it burning your lips.

STINE: Not burning, sort of a tickle.

BRIAN: A tingling almost like drinking something carbonated. And everyone was just really laughing and having a great time, and they prepared *fugu* all of the different ways you can prepare it; we're eating it fried, eating it steamed, eating it *sushi* style —

STINE: Grilled, soup —

BRIAN: Yeah. So, we ate the *fugu* liver and everyone went from hopping around and being excited to being like totally zen and calm. *(Laughter.)* I don't know if it was fear or if our bodies needed us to stay calm to fight off the toxins.

STINE: They told us about an opera singer who died because he loved *fugu* too much, he ate too much and it killed him.

DAK: Did you like it?

STINE: Yeah, it's very good. But you have several courses, they bring you soup first, with *fugu* in it. They bring you all these different things with *fugu* in it.

JULIA: Does it taste different depending on how it's prepared?

STINE: Yeah, *very* different. They bring out the pieces that they're going to grill — well, first they kill it in front of you and cut it up in front of you; you watch them do that. When they grill the pieces that are on the bone they bring it out and sprinkle pepper on it so that you can see it, and the flesh *moves* from the spice!

BRIAN: It *is* pretty politically incorrect, but man it tasted good. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Eating raw —*

STINE: Parts of it were raw. It was really cool.

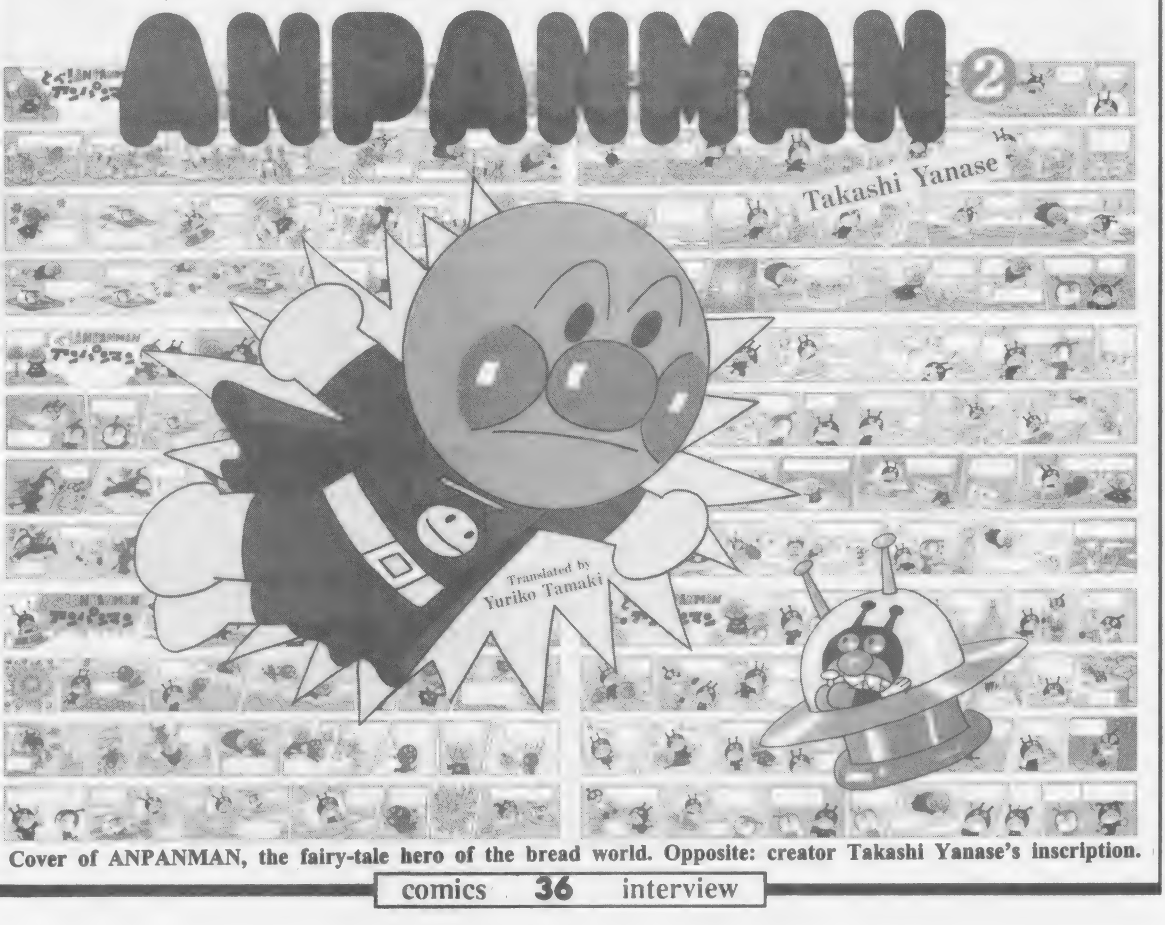
JULIA: *When it starts moving about, it's raw.*

BRIAN: Not only raw, it was *live.*

STINE: They did that before they went and grilled it, so it was *that fresh* is what they were showing you. They had some prepared *sushi* style, so they waited until we had arrived to kill them.

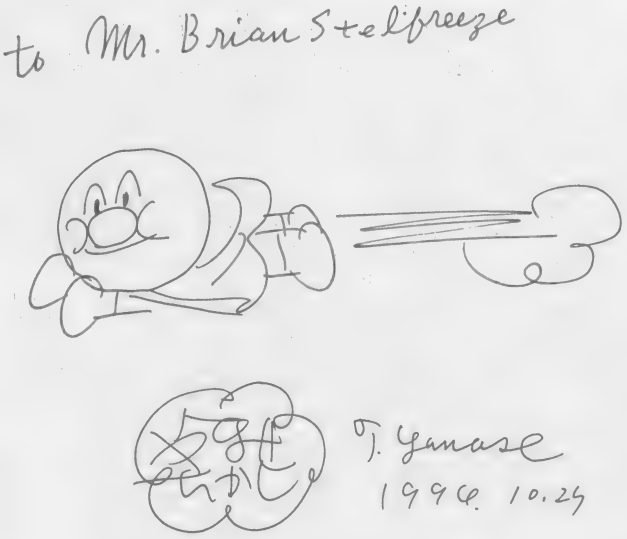
BRIAN: Yeah. When you prepare it *sushi* style it has to air out awhile, it has to sit like 30 minutes or something before you can eat it.

JULIA: *Makes you wonder, actually, how many people died finding all this out.*



Cover of ANPANMAN, the fairy-tale hero of the bread world. Opposite: creator Takashi Yanase's inscription.

does to most COMICS INTERVIEW readers.”



BRIAN: Oh, yeah, there were a bunch of people that blazed that trail before us.

STINE: Brian, what's the name of the artist from ANPANMAN?

BRIAN: Hm?

STINE: He was really sweet.

BRIAN: Oh, yeah, he was pretty cool, **Takashi Yanase.**

STINE: He gave me his tie —

DAK: *What's ANPANMAN?*

STINE: Anpan is a pastry, like a bean pastry — he has *several* characters that were designed around *food,* his books are for little little little little kids. But he's well marketed, he's got *everything.* He gave us aprons. *(Laughter.)* He had on a tie and I said it was really cute, so he immediately took it off and said I had to have it. And he gave us tons of books. They all joked when he came in about how wealthy he is.

JULIA: *Something like the Pillsbury Doughboy?*

STINE: Yeah.

BRIAN: It's really neat because it's a super popular character. I mean, we *met* the guy and ANPANMAN probably meant as much to us as it does to most COMICS INTERVIEW readers, like: Yeah, ANPANMAN, well whatever. But Stine and the guy really hit it off, you know, and they kind of went off, talking with the translators. Then Stine comes back and says, “He gave me his tie!” I was like, “Oh, that's pretty *cool.*” Then the next day we were walking around and we would see busses with this big Anpanman on the side, it was really a big deal. It was kind of like meeting **Walt Disney** but you never heard of him or Mickey Mouse, so he gives you his tie with his creation on it, then the next day you find out about the Magic Kingdom and go, “Oh, *that's* who I met.” *(Laughter.)* You don't realize how famous the guy is until the next day.

But he was a great guy — and he was a really *funny* guy, you know. That's something that was deceptive about *meeting* all of these comic-book artists, because they're just like American comic-book artists, but most of the American comic-book artists that I know are not rich; they may just be able to pay the rent from month to month. But just about everyone that was at this meeting were multi-millionaires, you know; they were like super super mega famous guys and girls who were making more money than I could possibly ever count. But they were *all* really cool, you know. They weren't super arrogant or anything like that, they were just really relaxed, really laid back people, and just really fun.

STINE: There was a woman artist who had been published since she was *twelve* or something. She's really famous, a really famous lady.

BRIAN: Yeah, they said she'd been doing comics for like 25 years, and I thought, “Man, she must be a *lot* older than how she looks.” Of course, we all think she must be in her 40s or 50s, then she says, “That doesn't mean that I'm really old, that means that I started when I was really young.” *(Laughter.)*

STINE: We saw videos with her picture on it. It was strange, we met all these people and then when we would go out we'd see all these marketing things.

BRIAN: That's when we realized just how famous these people were, you know. And it was really neat, like just three days ago I was talking with this woman on an equal basis and now I'm in an art supply store, looking at the comics section of this art supply store, and she's got *zip-a-tone* patterned after what she does. She's got comic-book paper that you can buy. She's mega mega famous, you know, just as a comic-book artist, and I'm thinking, “Oh, man, I thought she was just a regular human.” *(Laughter.)* But she *was;* they're all just regular people. You wouldn't know to meet them that they're all as famous as they actually are, from the way that they carry themselves, from the way that they dealt with everyone. And what's really fun is not only were they *not* major walking egos, we were, like, the best dressed people in the place. They were all —

STINE: Oh, no, some of them were pretty suave, had their ascots and nice blazers.

BRIAN: Yeah, they were looking pretty good, but they didn't have on Armani suits or anything like that, and they didn't, like, land in the helicopter and —

STINE: They had more *character* than that; they were very *interesting* people. They didn't wear suits all the same color; a lot of them wore ascots, though. And big glasses. They looked more like movie people in their colorful clothes and sunglasses.

“It was kind of like meeting Walt Disney but you never heard of him or Mickey Mouse.”

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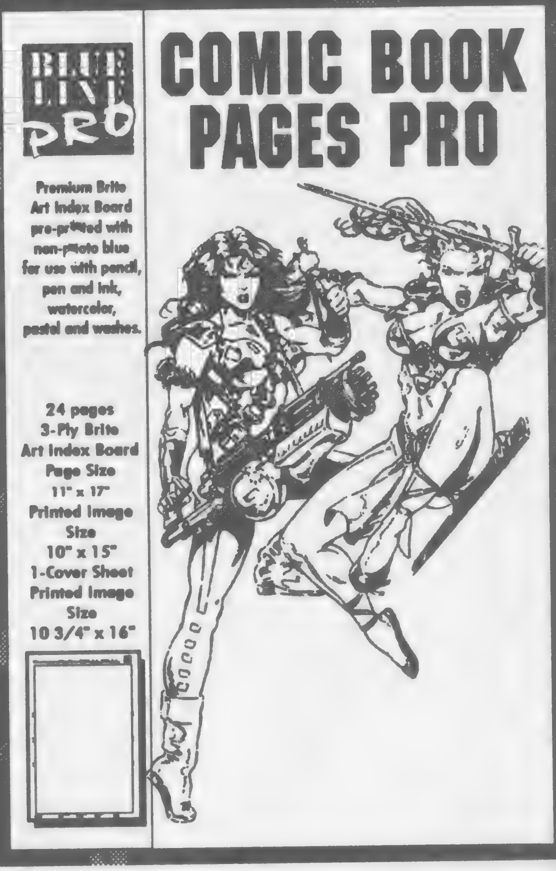
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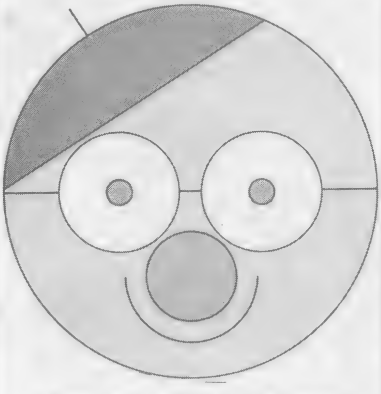
"It's changed looking at Japanese comics and at Japanese animation for me."



Above and below: by his beret shall ye know him.

BRIAN: They were fun folks to deal with, you know. And it's *changed* looking at Japanese comics and at Japanese animation for me, I've got a little bit more of an angle on the culture.

STINE: We did see one of **Tezuka's** works, an animation that he did not finish.

BRIAN: The last thing that he was working on, which is something . . . anyone who is interested in animation, this would be the *most* interesting thing to watch. **Tezuka** was really *obsessed* with animation, *all* forms of animation. All the stuff that **Disney** did, all of the stuff even from **Bill Hanna** and **Joe Barbera,** everything from **Winsor McCay** to **Max Fleischer** to **Chuck Jones** to YELLOW SUBMARINE to computer animation, everything, he was just really into it. And the last thing that he was working on was like an absolute complete homage to animation. It was the story of this little squirrel living in the forest, but *all* the things that happened, it was basically the *history* of animation! It started off with basic, real staccato — the spinning wheel you look through it and —

DAK: *Zoetrope.*

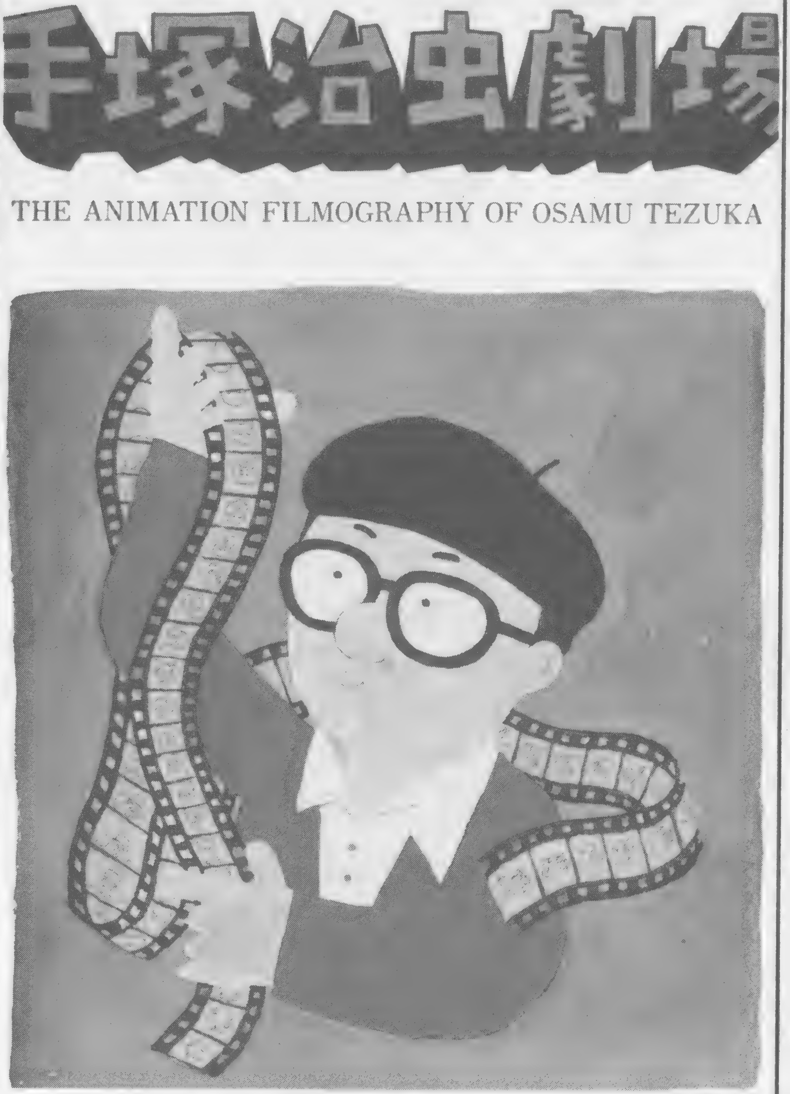
BRIAN: Yeah, well, it started off even before that; it started off with really just stick figure animation. And the animation was a particular story of this squirrel and this lumberjack who is cutting down the forest — so there's, like, *all* these messages going on.

STINE: Political, social, environmental, historical, it's thrilling.

BRIAN: What he did, he used the different phases of animation, it was one continuous story but he *bent* the animation to *look like* the animation that pioneered that form. There was one part of the story that sort of looked like GERTIE THE DINOSAUR, it had that sort of **Winsor McCay** look to it. And then there was another part of the story that had that STEAMBOAT WILLIE sort of look to it, early **Walt Disney.** There was another part of the story that sort of had a **Ralph Bakshi** look to it. He was really *bending* the animation to mimic all these different forms. The story basically starts at the first thing of animation that had ever been done, makes its way to cutting edge animation that's being done today — parts of it were going to be computer animated.

JULIA: *Is there no way they could finish it?*

BRIAN: I don't know, maybe they are, because **Tezuka** was so involved in this, and **Tezuka** did so much to it — it looked like there were three acts in the story, and the first two acts are done, the third act is the unfinished act. Some of the computer animation was done and there's some other parts of it. But the animation is really amazing. There's even a part in it of like the *limited* animation from Hanna-Barbera, where basically they just decided not to put in as many frames per second. And what's really funny is in that part of the story you've got one character that's *fully* animated, then you've got the other parts of the story in limited animation. It's really weird because when you're watching you don't notice that this animation is so much different from the


手塚治虫劇場
THE ANIMATION FILMOGRAPHY OF OSAMU TEZUKA

“If you’re studying Japanese animation or

Disney animation, but when you’re able to see it side by side, these characters sort of flow and move while these character have a sharp staccato sort of step-step movement. It’s really interesting.

This film alone is just the biggest education on animation that anyone could hope to get. It was the last thing **Tezuka** was working on and *even* in an incomplete form it is amazing. We went to Tezuka Productions and saw it on video. It’s really amazing sitting there and realizing this guy **Tezuka** was *real serious* about animation.

STINE: And we couldn’t have seen it if **Matsutani’s** daughter hadn’t figured out the VCR.

BRIAN: Yeah.

STINE: Just like here in the States, the parents sit down and they mess with the VCR and they can’t get it, the little girl knows just what to do. *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: We were at Tezuka Productions and it was really kind of bad because the **Pinis** and the **Eisners** had already left. **Matsutani** asked if we’d like to go by Tezuka Productions, so none of this was set up ahead of time. While we were there **Matsutani** said this was something neat we could see if we wanted to, so we went into the room to show the video — it’s like all these wires going everywhere, no one could figure it out. **Matsutani** was kind of behind the VCR, looking at it, going in front and pushing buttons, changing from one monitor to the other monitor, nothing. Then his daughter got up, did this, did this, did this, and it came on.

JULIA: *How old is she?*

STINE: I think she was eight.

JULIA: *Eight?* (Laughter.)

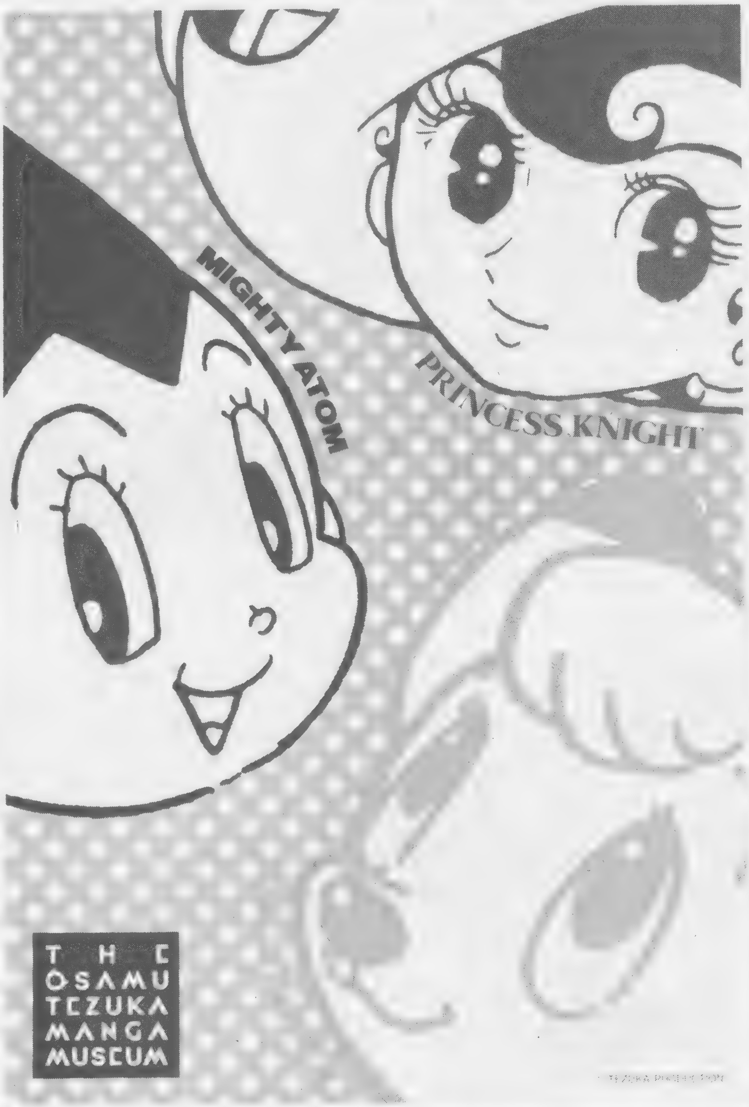
STINE: She struggled a bit with it, too, I have to say. I think they really kind of got it going together.

BRIAN: Yeah, but it was pretty funny.

STINE: We all joked about that, yeah. It’s the same kind of generation gap that happens here with technology. And we really should say that *all* of the artists that we met, famous, but each one of them has an amazingly high regard for **Tezuka.** They are *all* heavily heavily *influenced* by **Dr. Tezuka.** He’s it. They all sat there and talked about **Dr. Tezuka** and his ideas. So, Japanese comics truly stemmed from a lot of his thinking, his theory, and they all really really respected it.

BRIAN: If you’re studying Japanese animation or if you’re studying Japanese comics, you *have* to start with **Tezuka.** He is the father of Japanese animation, he is the father of Japanese comics. If you take a look at — you know how Japanese comics all have that face with the big eyes and little tiny mouth, that Speed Racer face; that’s kind of a weird thing for us Americans to get used to. **Dr. Tezuka** created that look and that look is now tradition. Any time a Japanese artist does that face, he is honoring **Dr. Tezuka.** That’s why a lot of Japanese animation looks alike to Americans, that’s why a lot

A couple of key characters created by the doctor, from the cover of THE OSAMU TEZUKA MANGA MUSEUM notebook.


MIGHTY ATOM
PRINCESS KNIGHT
THE OSAMU TEZUKA MANGA MUSEUM

“We did see one of Tezuka’s works, an animation he did not finish. The last thing he worked on.”

comics, you *have* to start with Tezuka.”

of the Japanese comics look alike to Americans, because all of the artists are in their own way paying respect to **Dr. Tezuka.**

STINE: We went and saw his office. **Wendy Pini** gave him some of her work many years ago, he had it hanging up in his office.

BRIAN: We went to Tezuka Productions and we're hanging out, looking at where they do the animation and where they do this and where all this stuff is kept, and then **Matsutani** stops and says, “Would you like to see **Dr. Tezuka's** studio?” We go up to this studio and it's like a shrine to **Dr. Tezuka,** everything is left exactly like it was the last day he was in there working. There is still mail that was sent to him, laying unopened on his desk. **Matsutani,** who is this classic Japanese businessman, he's teary-eyed. He starts telling us about how **Tezuka's** wife would come in and clean up and organize the studio for **Tezuka** every couple of weeks or so, and she still does it. She still comes to the studio and keeps everything in order, but everything is exactly as it was left.

And there's all this artwork on the walls, there's **Wendy Pini's** drawing, and there's one of the actual cels from GERTIE THE DINOSAUR. It's really neat to see all of this stuff and to know that this is the guy, he started all of it, he is why Japanese comics and Japanese animation exist. And he was an actual medical doctor.

DAK: *I was wondering about that.*

BRIAN: Yeah, and not an honorary degree. He had studied and practiced a general M.D.

STINE: And he had a massive fascination with insects.

BRIAN: Yeah.

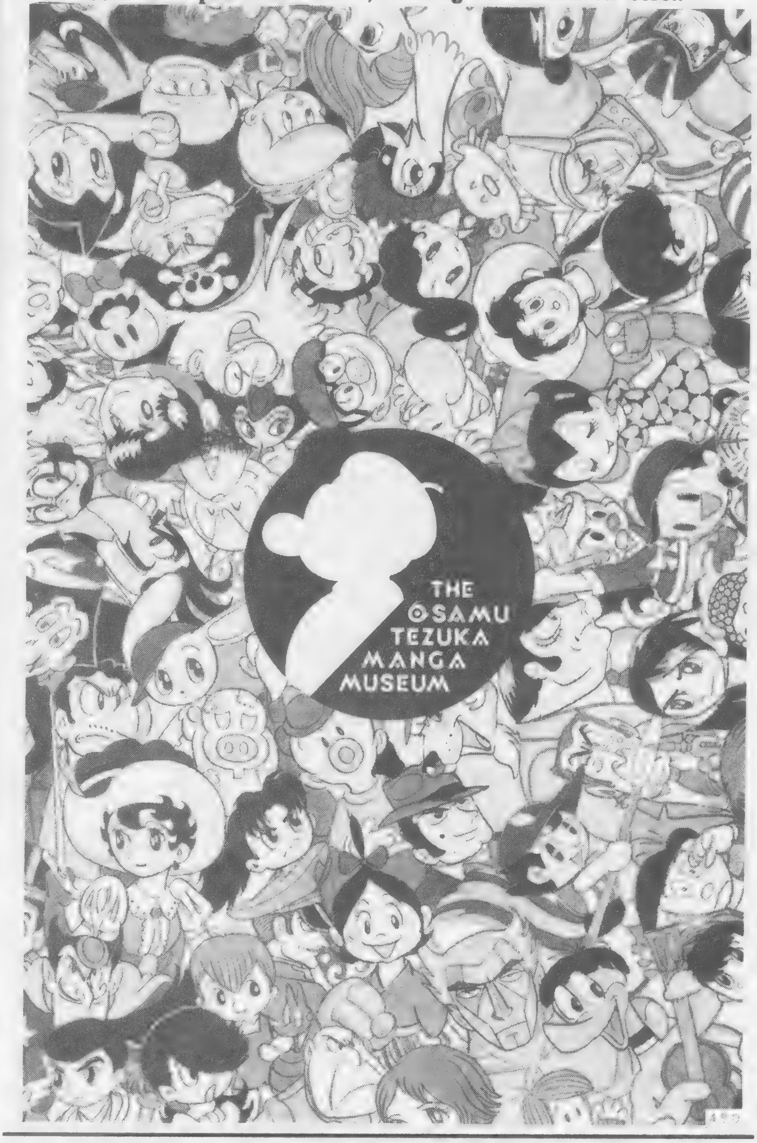
STINE: He drew all of the time growing up, and he drew all the way through medical school. In the museum they have all of his bug collection and a lot of his early drawings, bugs and plants and things like that. Really minute details; he studied little tiny things.

BRIAN: All of this stuff was in his studio, we saw original pages of **Dr. Tezuka's** original ASTRO BOY stuff, and original cels and stuff like that, stuff that belongs *in* the museum. But he produced such a wealth of work that there could be several museums. A lot of his early animation, *he* sat down and did it one frame at a time.

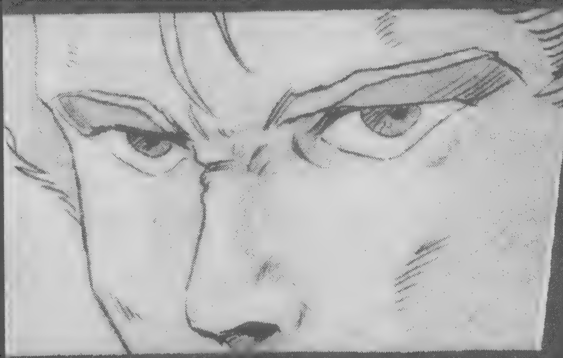
STINE: And he really had a love for children. The whole museum is designed *really* for kids, there's rides and there's computer things. But it's all done in an extremely educational fashion. He was really big on using comics and animation to *teach* about life, the world, community.

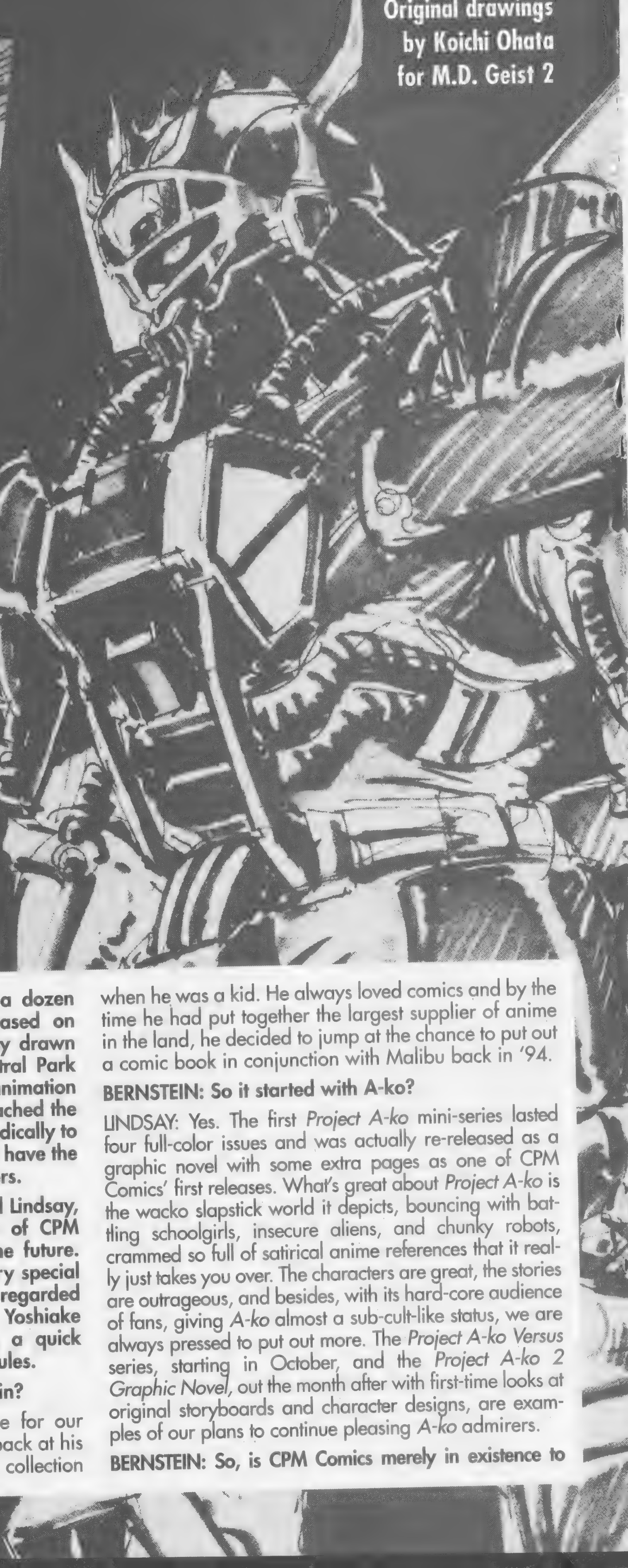
BRIAN: There's a lot of interactive stuff where kids can go in and design their own animation, it's really a neat thing. You can go there as a kid and learn how to do animation from beginning to end. It was a whole lot of fun being there. Everything about Japan was a whole lot of fun.

More of the many characters he created. Note stylized silhouette of Tezuka in profile in center, wearing his trademark beret.



> **“This film alone is just the biggest education on animation that anyone could hope to get.”**





Original drawings by Koichi Ohata for M.D. Geist 2

CPM Comics: Manga for the Western World

As of this month, CPM Comics will have a dozen comic books in print, all full-color all based on Japanese animation, and almost all entirely drawn by Americans. The publishing arm of Central Park Media, the largest supplier of Japanese animation (anime) in the U.S., CPM Comics has approached the world of American comics slowly and methodically to make sure its Japan-inspired product would have the most direct connection with American readers.

David Bernstein spoke recently with Michael Lindsay, the Editor-In-Chief and General Manager of CPM Comics, about its launch and plans for the future. Also, Young Hwal Son put together two very special interviews of two of the most highly regarded Japanese animation artists in America — Yoshiake Kawajiri and Koichi Ohata, both taking a quick break from their grueling production schedules.

DAVID BERNSTEIN: So, where did it all begin?

MICHAEL LINDSAY: Really with the chance for our Managing Director, John O'Donnell, to get back at his mother for throwing away his *Spider-man* collection when he was a kid. He always loved comics and by the time he had put together the largest supplier of anime in the land, he decided to jump at the chance to put out a comic book in conjunction with Malibu back in '94.

BERNSTEIN: So it started with A-ko?

LINDSAY: Yes. The first *Project A-ko* mini-series lasted four full-color issues and was actually re-released as a graphic novel with some extra pages as one of CPM Comics' first releases. What's great about *Project A-ko* is the wacko slapstick world it depicts, bouncing with battling schoolgirls, insecure aliens, and chunky robots, crammed so full of satirical anime references that it really just takes you over. The characters are great, the stories are outrageous, and besides, with its hard-core audience of fans, giving *A-ko* almost a sub-cult-like status, we are always pressed to put out more. The *Project A-ko Versus* series, starting in October, and the *Project A-ko 2 Graphic Novel*, out the month after with first-time looks at original storyboards and character designs, are examples of our plans to continue pleasing *A-ko* admirers.

BERNSTEIN: So, is CPM Comics merely in existence to

please the fans who enjoy the anime?

LINDSAY: Not merely, no. A good deal of the people who buy the comics do so because they are fans or are familiar with the title, or anime and manga in general, but what we are trying to do as a publisher is reach far beyond that and connect with people who haven't been exposed to the world of anime and manga. This is the reason why we have been putting our books out in color. I don't want to limit the way we depict stories in the future by saying that we will "always" put all our books out in color, but, for right now, we feel that we can reach a broader American audience with full-color comics done in an American comic book format. All of the artists we have used have strong sensitivities towards the Japanese style, but they are also familiar with American comic books and how they are laid out. All except one of course.

BERNSTEIN: Ohata?

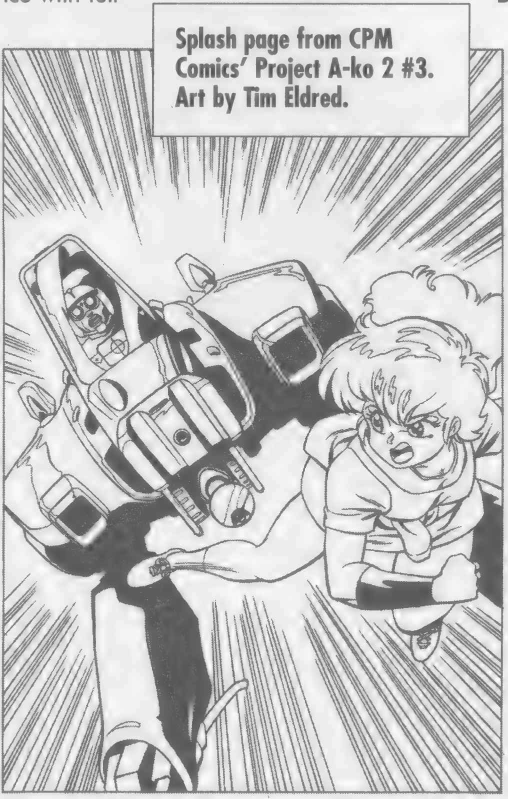
LINDSAY: That's right. We have really been fortunate as a company to be so close with an artist of Koichi Ohata's caliber. His work also really represents who we are as a company in terms of style and attitude and I think that mainly stems from the type of person he is. Just like some people in the U.S. believe that they can understand what type of person somebody is by asking them about their "sign," people in Japan inquire about a person's blood type. From what I understand, Ohata's blood type is "B" which means that he is a individualist, doing what he knows is right inside, instead of following what others say. His graphic style and storytelling really have a gripping appeal to Americans that I think is unique among Japanese artists, especially in its directness. He is extremely open-minded, direct, and honest as a person and I think this translates into great strength in his characters. The character M.D. Geist has actually become the mascot of our company.

BERNSTEIN: How big of a role did Ohata play in making of the *M.D. Geist* comic book and how are you involving him in other projects?

LINDSAY: Ohata did all of the art and coloring on the covers of the *M.D. Geist* series as well as an average of five pages of art per issue. We have almost finished breaking down the story he wrote for the *M.D. Geist Zero* series that will show how Geist became "Most Dangerous" and we have plans to work with him closely as well on putting together a special comic book series for the animated feature film *M.D. Geist 2*, which Central Park Media is currently co-producing with Nippon Columbia.

BERNSTEIN: Do you have any plans to collaborate on projects with any other Japanese artists?

LINDSAY: Not specifically, but we certainly would like to. Kawajiri, who did *Demon City Shinjuku* and *Cyber City OEDO 808*, the latter of which we are making into a comic book series starting in September of this year, is a phenomenal talent who has a universal chic appeal to his style. In fact, his blood type is "AB" which represents uniqueness in Japan and the greatest potential for genius. The three characters he created for *Cyber City*, along with the backdrop and plot for their adventures are really so good, it's a damn shame there are only three stories that make up the series.



Splash page from CPM Comics' Project A-ko 2 #3. Art by Tim Eldred.

BERNSTEIN: Tell me about your American artists.

LINDSAY: They have all been great to work with and all of us are proud of the books we have put out. Tim Eldred, who is now working on the *Cyber City* series, did *Project A-ko 2* and collaborated with Ohata on *Geist*, is probably our star right now because of his adaptability and his terrific aptitude for laying out a story. Bruce Lewis, who has done *Gall Force: Eternal Story* and is now preparing for the continuation of the epic tale with *Gall Force: Destruction*, has been fun to work with because of his love of the story and the way he interjects the experience of his Navy days into the military interplay and dialogue between the space vessels and crews. John Ott, who has always been close to the *A-ko* series, is moving beyond the great coloring jobs he has done and taking A-ko and crew out to an alternate universe in November with the new *Project A-ko Versus* series.

BERNSTEIN: What are CPM Comics' plans for the future?

LINDSAY: We have always approached the comic book world step by step and now it's time to move up to a new level. Starting out as a video publisher of Japanese animation, we did our first books as straight American adaptations of the stories we had. But now, with some experience under our belts, we plan to do prequels and sequels (like *M.D. Geist Zero* and *M.D. Geist 2*), as well as crossovers with American comic characters, expansions of existing story lines, and sometime, maybe as soon as next year, series with original characters and stories. We're excited, but we are not going to rush into anything and sacrifice the quality of our product.

BERNSTEIN: How do you fit personally into all of this?

LINDSAY: Having lived, studied and worked over in Japan for over two and a half years, I really came to appreciate how the extremes in our two cultures can meet in the middle for an incredible combination, especially in terms of graphic style and popular culture. Our company has

CPM COMICS
continued

always tried to build bridges between the U.S. and Japan, first by trying to bring the best of Japanese animation to the U.S. in English and now by taking the best stories, characters and elements of anime and bringing them to U.S. comic book readers in an Americanized format. So, in answer to your question, I fit right in the middle.

Interview With Koichi Ohata

by Young Hwal Son

Koichi Ohata

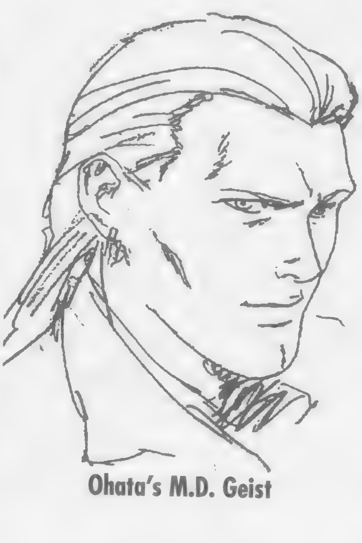
Koichi Ohata is the creator of *M.D. Geist* and the director of *Genocyber,* two very popular works of Japanese animation in the U.S. Ohata did fifteen interior pages and all of the covers of the first *M.D. Geist* series put out by CPM Comics this summer and is currently working on the animated feature film sequel to *M.D. Geist,* now being done as a co-production agreement between Central Park Media and Nippon Columbia in Japan. Ohata is also participating in putting together the CPM Comics *M.D. Geist Zero* series due for release in the U.S. at the start of next year.

How did you like the results of your work on *M.D. Geist* the comic book?

Very good. I've always admired American comic books from afar and I am really happy that *M.D. Geist,* a piece of Japanese animation, became an actual American comic book that people can enjoy in the U.S.

Having now worked on an American comic book, in what ways do you think it is different from working on traditional Japanese manga?

Although I am not a true professional manga artist, I have worked on a few manga books. I actually think that there is more freedom for the artist to express themselves in manga vs. American comics. Perhaps this is due to less restrictions in terms of page count, how the books have to be broken down and the higher status artists are given in Japan, but on the whole, I think this is changing in the U.S. I also see more and more of an influence of Japanese and European styles in American comics these days, a trend which I think could result in the gradual creation of an international style that transcends the stylistic borders around regions that currently exist.



Ohata's M.D. Geist

***Genocyber* is a wild work of animation. Despite the existence of a black and white manga having been done by Tony Takezaki, would you want to do a full-color version like you did with *M.D. Geist* and, if so, how would it be different from the manga and different from the film?**

Yes. I have always wanted to publish *Genocyber* in more of an American comic book style than the fine work that was put out by Takezaki. This is because I think it would be a better medium to express the overall theme of *Genocyber.* What will make the comic special will be the expansion of the storytelling far beyond what everyone has seen in the animated series, in which many scenes had to be cut out. I am very satisfied with how the *Genocyber* films turned out, but I think the *Genocyber* tale should be told in more detail to do justice to the complexity and depth of the entire idea I want to convey.

With the success of *M.D. Geist,* you and CPM Comics have decided to do a prequel or a zero comic book series. Before this opportunity presented itself, had you ever thought about doing a story about the creation of M.D. Geist as a character?

When the first film came out in the mid-80's, I already had the script ready for #2 and a story done about how "the Most Dangerous Soldier" was created. Since that time I have been waiting for the best opportunity to make Geist come back to life and even take a step back to detail the development of his character, a character which I have to regard as my favorite to date.

What significance does the character of M.D. Geist and the story have to you personally?

Three things come to mind with that question. First, coming into the project, I had always been disappointed with the way the general public looked at animation in the same way they looked at toys or other stuff for kids. I wanted to prove that animation was not just for children and this is one of the reasons I created *Geist.* Second, I wanted to challenge the unfairness associated with how important seniority and being well connected are in the animation industry in Japan and in Japan as a whole. As a virtual unknown at the time, all that I could do was put out good creative work, hoping that, if it was judged solely in that respect, I could rise above the standards of the time. Third, I wanted to make a type of animation that no one had done before. Once those three concepts came together, animation all of a sudden became a lot more important in my life.

Please explain the reason why you want to do *M.D. Geist Zero* and also the sequel.

It's not a question of why I "want to," but why I must. Ever since I did the first one I have felt obligated to do the others. I finished the first *M.D. Geist* with a cliffhanger on purpose to prepare for the upcoming storylines and I am extremely appreciative that I now have the chance to finally push these personally important projects through. I am sure that the fans will like what they see.

CPM Comics likes to use the term "print anime" for the color comics

they put out, rather than the traditional term of "manga." Do you think this type of treatment is superior to black and white manga comics?

Since I am not a professional manga artist, but more of an animation creator, all I can say is that I do not want to limit myself with any labels as I move into the "print" world. All I strive for is the ability to best express myself and I think that what has happened with CPM Comics, putting out our "print anime," is a terrific development in the way it can express the potency of stories and characters. I enjoyed working on the first *Geist* comic book project and I am looking forward to the next two. It is an incredible feeling to be sitting in Japan with a full-color comic book in your hands that is not only a hard copy of your ideas, but something that has made it into the hands of thousands of others throughout America.

Interview with Yoshiaki Kawajiri

by Young Hwal Son

Yoshiaki Kawajiri is one the hottest properties in Japanese animation. With his own distinctively sharp style, he has become one of the preeminent character designers and directors in his field, with credits that include *Demon City Shinjuku* (images of which were featured in the motion picture *Johnny Mnemonic*), *Wicked City* and the *Running Man* segment from MTV's Liquid Television. One of his more recent works, *Cyber City OEDO 808,* is being made into a six-issue comic book by CPM Comics, debuting this month and featured on the cover. His associate Yasuteru Iwase told us that this is the first time he has been interviewed for an American publication.

How did you get started in animation?

Actually, I really wanted to become a manga artist, so I tried to be one, but the more I studied, the more I became attracted to film and the telling of stories in animated form.

What personal significance does the story of *Cyber City* and the characters have for you?

I thought of the characters first, out of which the story came next. (In regards to some personal significance) the characters just seemed interesting to me. I must say that it was difficult putting together a story around the three unique characters, but the more the story went on the more happy and comfortable I felt with it.

Where did the idea for *Cyber City* come from?

Originally *Cyber City* was planned to be put out in a three mediums: a video game by Juzo Mutsuki, a novel by Akinori Endo, and the animation done by me. Together we put together a story around the characters but what you may find interesting is that a manga comic book was not planned.

Well, now having an advance copy of the first issue of *Cyber City* in your hand, what do you think about Americans redoing your story in a full-color comic format? '

"Totemo subarashii dekibai de kin itte imasu." Translation: Terrific! Well done! I am into it!

Have you ever thought about doing a prequel to the story in anime or comic book format?

No. Actually, not.

Have you ever read American comic books? If so, which ones?

I really like Spawn by McFarlane. It would be great if I could do an animation piece of it.

What do you think about making a comic book out of *Demon City Shinjuku?*

I would really look forward to it.

Who or what has had the greatest influence on your style?

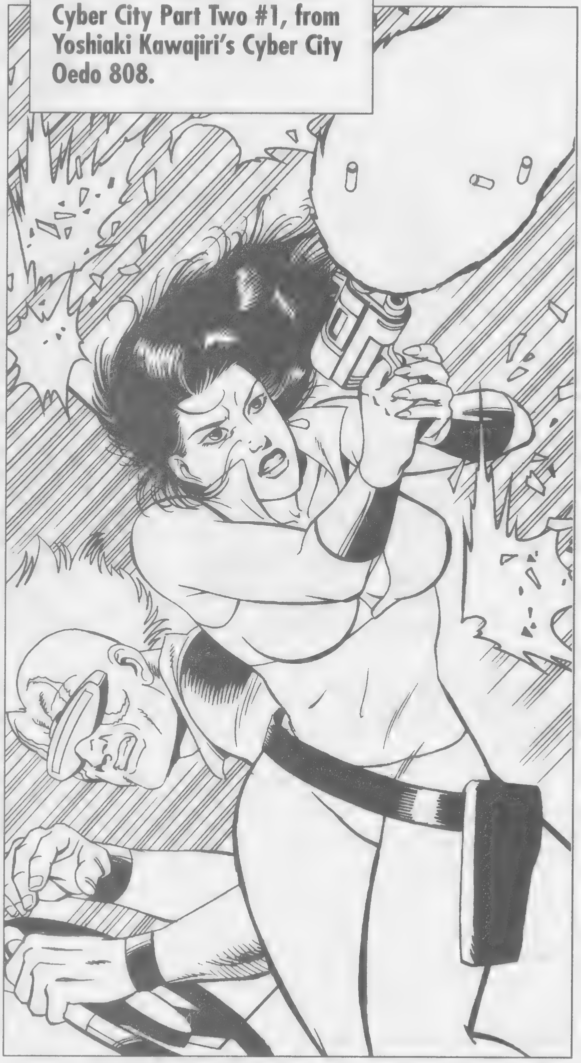
The greatest influence has been Makura Saki, who taught me what to cut out and what to enhance.

Have you been influenced by any American artists through movies or comic books? If so, which ones?

Walter Hill, George Roy Hill, and James Cameron.

What projects are you working on now?

I have been working on *Tetsuwan Birdy,* a comedy about a super-heroine, with the original story by Masami Yuki.



Cover art from CPM Comics' Cyber City Part Two #1, from Yoshiaki Kawajiri's Cyber City Oedo 808.

"I understand in America comics are still

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

Frank Miller's cover letter — sent along with his questions to LONE WOLF/KOZURE OKAMI writer Kazuo Koike and artist Goseki Kojima — makes the best introduction to this very exclusive interview (needless to say, Frank draws the covers and writes forwards for the American edition of LONE WOLF):

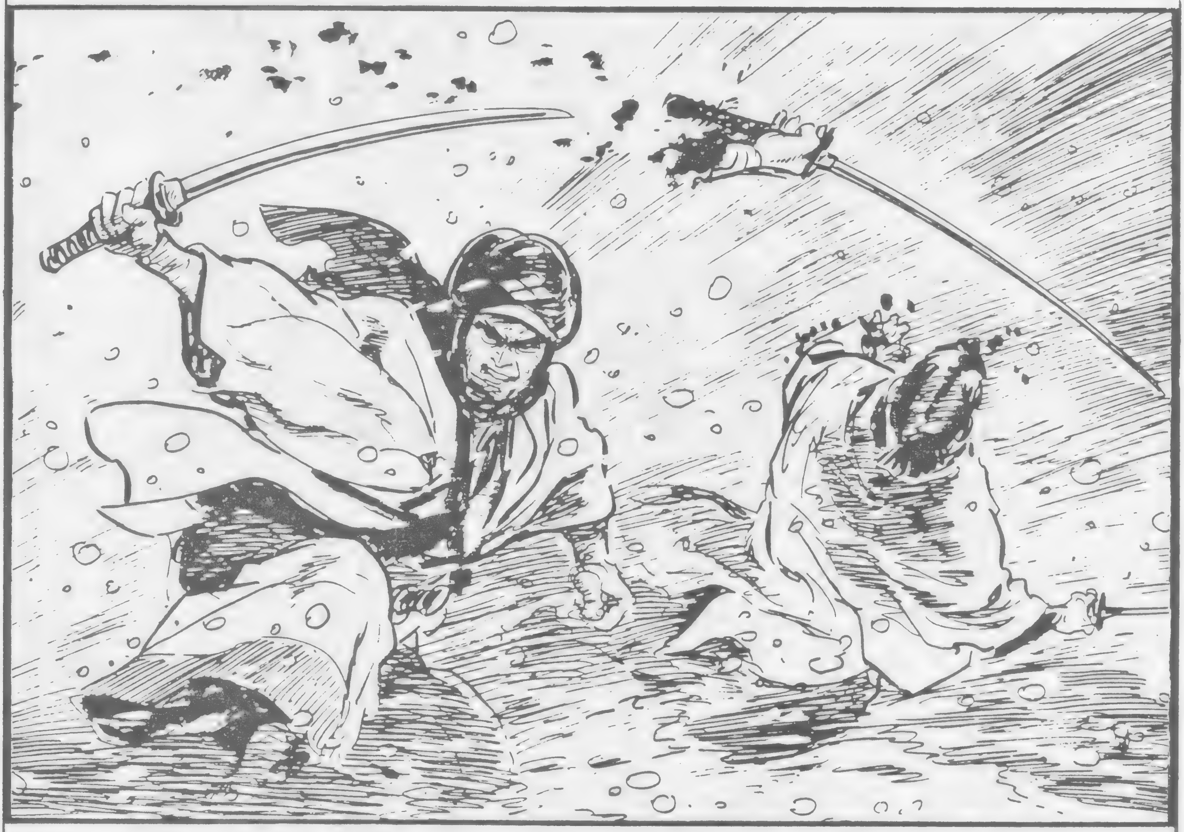
"Dear Sirs,

I'm informed by COMICS INTERVIEW magazine that you have agreed to your first interview for an American comics magazine. As an admirer of your masterful work, KOZURE OKAMI, I am honored to have the opportunity to prepare the following list of questions for you.

While KOZURE OKAMI has quickly attracted a strong following in America, very little is known to U.S. comics readers and professionals about Japanese comics. Please be patient with the questions about the general shape of comics sales and business practices. They are included because I believe American comics artists, in particular, will find your answers not only enlightening but inspiring. Our history in these areas is a sorry one, only recently showing signs of improvement, and your example could help in the movement toward further advancing the rights

All art accompaning this interview is © 1987 First Comics, Inc. & Global Communications Corp.

looked upon as children's entertainment."



of cartoonists and the progress of this wonderful artform itself.

Thank you again for your attention to this interview, and most particularly and emphatically, thank you for KOZURE OKAMI.

— Frank Miller"

This interview must set some kind of precedent for international speed, communications and cooperation. Frank's questions went via Federal Express to First Comics, where they were telexed to Global Communications in Tokyo and translated for Mr. Koike and Mr. Kojima, whose answers were translated from Japanese into English and telexed back to First Comics. Alex Wald provided annotations, and copies were then sent, again via Federal Express, to DAVID A. KRAFT for final editing. Kudos are due all parties involved.

Considering the communications obstacles posed by language and cultural differences, something is inevitably lost in the translation, but where editing for clarification was necessary, care has been taken to capture the intended meaning.

FRANK MILLER: *American comics readers have only recently been treated to English language translations of Japanese comics. Their reaction has been, to say the least, enthusiastic, most particularly to your LONE WOLF AND CUB, which has surpassed most American comics in sales and critical success. What might startle American readers is the extent of LONE WOLF's success in Japan.*

I've heard conflicting reports as to the number of editions of LONE WOLF that have seen print, and as to the number of copies sold. All have far exceeded the sales of any American comic book in history. Could you please clarify, for us, exactly how many millions have been sold in Japan?

KAZUO KOIKE: I should say it's about 8 million copies sold in Japan. What I mean to say is, at the least. Because, in Japan, there is a tendency to quote less for the tax reason. It is often misjudged by believing "public figures" released by each publisher, which are sometimes more and sometimes less than the actual.

I must point out LOAN WOLF AND CUB had been periodically published, one episode each, in the magazine — which had a weekly readership circulation of 1 million to 2 million. Almost simultaneously, the book format was published first in 28 volumes and second in 14 volumes (both contents were same). This is very typical in the case of Japanese comics, but characteristically, it's completely different from American comics. That's why I can only talk about the book format readership.

FRANK: *Given such staggering numbers, Japanese comics must sell to readers of every age. While visiting Japan, I saw men and women of every age and economic class reading comic books. It's clear that the people of your country have accepted comics as a worthy part of your popular culture. Has this always been the case? And, if not, was there a particular time when comics came to be so widely accepted?*

KOIKE: We, our generation of comics people, made the changes. I understand in America, comics are still being looked upon as children's entertainment. But, our generation does not think comics different

“I hated his script. So I started to insert

from TV, radio or newspaper media. It's fine to accept comics as a media, equal to television, as a part of general entertainment. In Japan, comics surpassed television media power, at least in the effectiveness of longevity of story in mass culture. The comics is the number one medium in Japan now. That's why Japan has more variety of genre in comics — not just hero types. That's why they attract the general audience.

FRANK: *One of the main obstacles, in America, to getting comics accepted as more than just children's entertainment has been the attitude held by many Americans, that heroes must provide models of proper social conduct for children. Is this attitude prevalent in Japan?*

KOIKE: In Japan, the public treats comics just like TV. In America or Japan, I believe, the middle age group or working class's only leasure, when they get back home, is to watch television. You should think of comics as a part of daily commodity, not anything special from other media. Of course, TV has certain moral codes which should not be imposed any differently on comics. As TV is in every home, comics should be there, too.

FRANK: *What, if any, forms of censorship are imposed on Japanese comics? One of the many joys of reading LONE WOLF is how pure and direct it is in portraying its story. Did you and Mr. Kojima find yourselves, at any point, required to delete or alter your story? I ask this because censorship has become an increasing problem for American comics artists recently.*

KOIKE: Yes, there was censorshihp in Japan, as well. Every one of us, at that time, was bearing with hardship and poorness. A lot of genius was born at that time. We had to fight back such censorship with our own efforts.

FRANK: *I understand that LONE WOLF is based on genuine Japanese history. I've even been told that a wooden babycart loaded with weapons exists in a Japanese museum. Please explain how and when you created LONE WOLF, and where it fits in your country's history. Was there a Yagyu clan? Was there an Ogami-Itto?*

KOIKE: In the movie, we had many examples of artifacts, including a babycart — but not in the museum. Yagyu existed in history, but everything else is a fiction. The time was particularly set in the Tokugawa 4th generation of Shogun called the Ietsuna Era. I trust all the historical backgrounds were accurate.

FRANK: *Every segment of LONE WOLF seems to offer more insight into bushido. I realize that, as exotic as bushido is to Western eyes, it is an essential element of Japanese history and thought, one as familiar to your people as it is unfamiliar to mine. Even so, your ability to translate its concepts, to make them so easily understood, is extraordinary, and has been enlightening to me. Is this the result simply of your talent, or are you particularly schooled in this subject?*

KOIKE: I hold 4th degree of Kendo. I practice archery, as well. I was born to the family of Bushido tradition. So, it was natural for me to understand Hagakure Bushido, based on the idea of Buddhism and Confucianism. Bushido is in the center of Buddhism and Confucianism, nothing can be a part. [Buddhism and Confucianism are an integral element of Bushido. Bushido — Way of the Warrior.]

FRANK: *Very recently, in America, schools teaching comics art have begun to appear, and classes on comics are beginning to be taught at American universities. But these are very new, and the vast majority of American comics artists have learned the craft only by studying existing work, and, of course, the related fields of film, literature, and illustration. Do schools for comics exist in Japan? And, if they do, how long have they existed?*

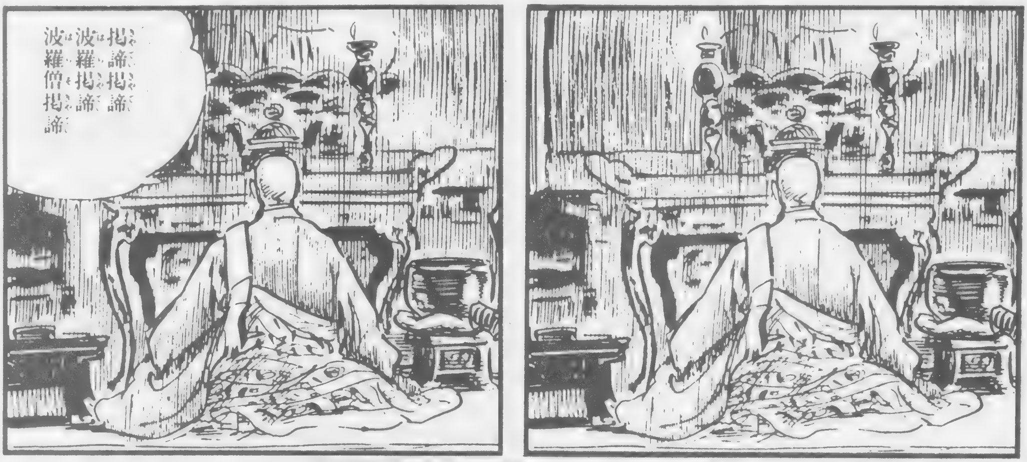
KOIKE: My school *Gekiga-sonjuku* graduates dominate the Japanese comics now. However, you can't teach comics. Don't make a mistake on that point.

You have to pull one's talent out, that's all. If you teach, you are just imposing your style on a person. In my school, we help a person to recognize his own talent, what he is the best at. If you are good for writing, then please become a novelist. If you are good for TV, choose another way. In the last 12 years of my educational experiences, I saw a hundred students graduating to a variety of professions — not just in comics. It's not a school to teach how to draw comics or face.

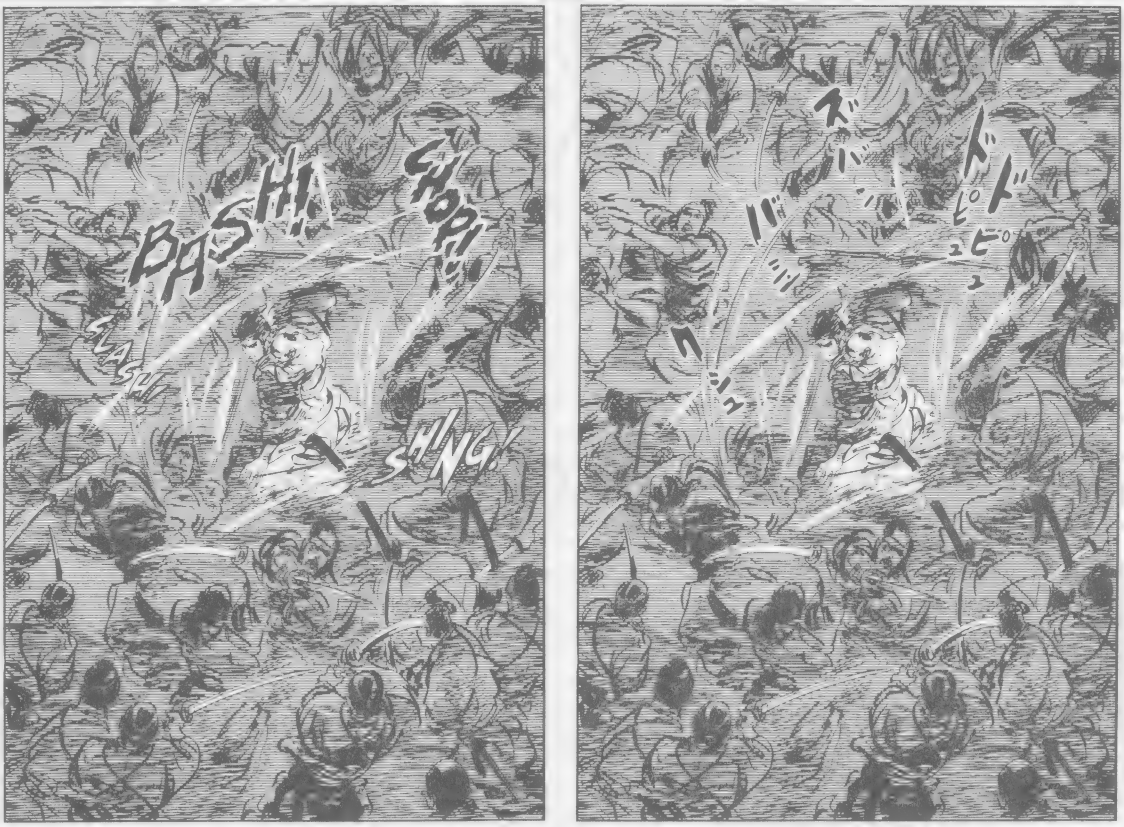
FRANK: *Your artwork is an inspiration to me, and through it I have become exposed to some of the wealth of Japanese art. Could you name which artists of your own country have affected you most deeply, and which influenced the development of your style?*

GOSEKI KOJIMA: I like *suiboku-ga* (ink & water painting). I started to draw pictures at a very early age, but my most influenced Japanese art is by **Mr. Gyokudo Kawai**. I dislike *suiboku-ga* ar-

Some hehind-the-scenes effort involved in importing Japan's biggest comic. First Comics' artist Paul Guinan says "Sometimes we need to change the balloon positioning — and there will be a giant hole left in the artwork, which we'll have to fill in. In issue #3 a Buddhist monk is chanting a prayer that was too complex to translate properly, to give it justice, so it was left out, and I had to refinish his shrine in the style of the original artist."


掲諦掲諦
波羅掲諦
波羅僧掲諦

some nonsense, releasing the tension.”


CHOP!!
BASH!!
SLASH!
SHING!
ドド
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ズバッ
バシッ
ヒュッ

An example of how Japanese sound effects do, or don't, translate.

tists who draw with their own emotion, or try to state what is the nature. The real plum-blossom flower is beautiful in nature. You will only try it to transform in ink and brush.

I like the movies a lot. I enjoy drawing pictures from what I saw in the movies when I was child. I did most all that has to do with ink and brush, including being a billboard artist — all sorts of different work in order to live. There was nothing — no entertainment — right after the war. I produced and painted paper board-picture-theatre on bicycle for children for nearly 10 years. [**Mr. Kojima** refers to the *kami-shibai* or "paper plays" that were popular in Japan before the rise of the modern *Magna. Kami-shibai* usually featured a series of large painted cards that could be changed in sequence, held by a slotted frame. The artist would also narrate the pictures. This was an outdoor, traveling entertainment, able to setup on any street corner, hence the bicycle.] Then, after that, I got involved with comics. It was about 1957.

FRANK: *Did any Western artists contribute to your approach?*

KOJIMA: I don't fit into particularly any western art. I think movies are the highest form of western art. THE THIRD MAN was one early picture I liked most. I even became a projectionist and billboard artist for a small theatre. I learned how to draw there, too. I was in such poverty, but everything was so enjoyable I never felt hard about it.

FRANK: *LONE WOLF is such an overwhelmingly visual experience that I've often wondered how exactly you collaborated with* **Mr. Koike?** *So many of the best moments of the story are wordless. What form did Mr. Koike use when writing the story? Did he describe the content of each panel, or describe the action as one would in a screenplay, leaving its adaptation to panels up to Mr. Kojima?*

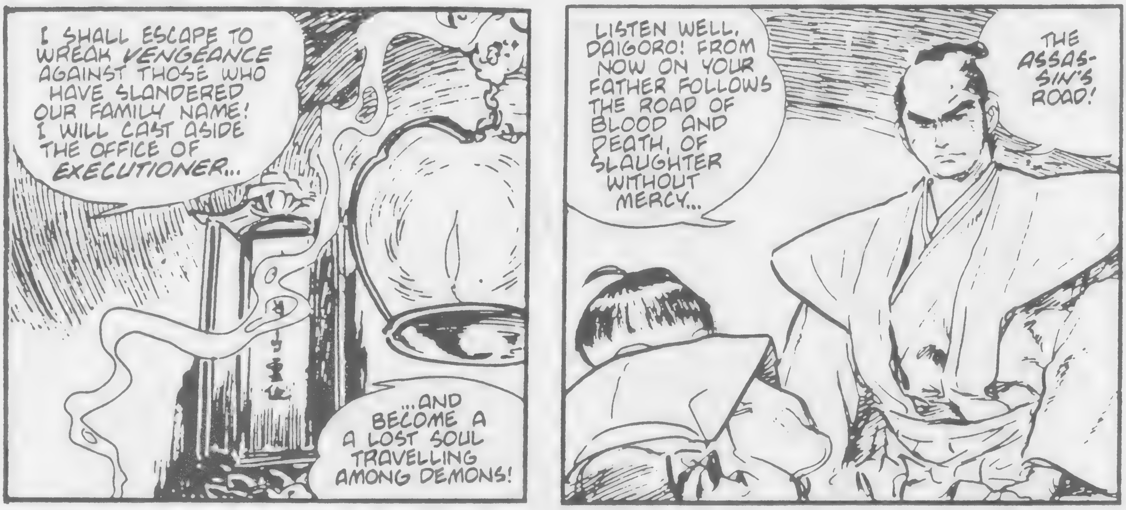
KOIKE: Mr. Kojima and I are very close friends. We worked together. I wrote the story of LONE WOLF AND CUB and influenced the composition of frames — otherwise, he would have continued the box style of comics.

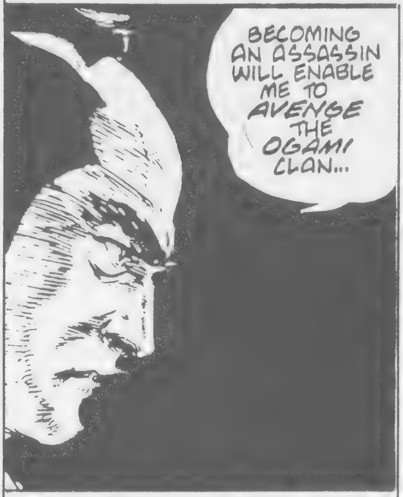
KOJIMA: Oh, I hated his script. He tried to give me a lot of words for the characters. So I started to insert some nonsense — Daigoro's expressions — releasing the tension of the story. That's seemed to get so popular. It's worked, I think. He gave me freedom and I appreciated it. If **Mr. Koike** is the writer, I am the movie director and cast. You have to be very flexible in order to take such a role. I think that's come from my nature. I always say, you have to create a drama — even when you draw the tree or a stone.

Mr. Sanpei Shirato highly regarded my drawings, and I drew all the pictures in KAMUI. "Kamui- Gaiden" is copied from my previous style. [**Mr. Kojima** is saying here that he was the original artist on the first KAMUI series authored by **Sanpei Shirato**. The subsequent Kamui series — there are several — are drawn in "**Kojima**-style."] "Yagyu-Ninja" or "Nuke-nin" are also terminology I collaborated to create for **Mr. Shirato**. I enjoyed the work with him, too.

FRANK: *What struck me first about your artwork on LONE WOLF was the combat scenes, so full of motion and power. You seem to break the figures into streaks, emphasizing movement over the careful description of form. I wish I could sit with you and talk about this in person, since among the many virtues of your work, it is the one that has affected me most pro-*

“I draw alone at the edge, fearing some


I SHALL ESCAPE TO WREAK VENGEANCE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE SLANDERED OUR FAMILY NAME! I WILL CAST ASIDE THE OFFICE OF EXECUTIONER...
...AND BECOME A LOST SOUL TRAVELLING AMONG DEMONS!
LISTEN WELL, DAIGORO! FROM NOW ON YOUR FATHER FOLLOWS THE ROAD OF BLOOD AND DEATH, OF SLAUGHTER WITHOUT MERCY...
THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD!


BECOMING AN ASSASSIN WILL ENABLE ME TO AVENGE THE OGAMI CLAN...

foundly, but since I can't, let me ask you to speak on this most thrilling and original aspect of your work. Was this the product of careful theory, or did it seem to you, from the beginning, the only proper way to capture the grace and speed of warriors in combat?

KOJIMA: You draw the picture by your own nerve. You have to be a Lone Wolf. Every human being is not created equal. Comics can't be taught in school. Of course, you will use your arm but — if I must — I don't mind using my foot. Absolutely and entirely, it will depend on your expressive nerve. Even if you become my assistant for 20 years, you will only be a copy man. The publisher often comments to young artists, “bring your individual character!” But that's easy because everyone has that. I know a brilliant comic artist who became an assistant to a famous artist, and now the master gives him a direction and everyone else copies from this chief assistant. The creativity stops right there, all the pictures start to level off the same.

In my case, I draw alone at the edge, fearing someone, some day, will surpass me. So, naturally my drawing has a tendency for the growth momentum. If I ever wear down, the pictures will become dull and low tone. Even my publisher will try to pursue me — it will be my time to resign. I'll be worn out. So you must be kidding. I can't draw the picture the same all the time. In fact, my problem is how to draw a character continuously the same throughout the story!

KOIKE: Also, Japanese comics move in a frame. The eye moves in Japanese comics. That's the fundamental difference between Japanese and American comics. American comics have a tendency to stay within a frame, and a frame stands individually. Japanese comics have a tendency for one frame to interfere with the next frame, running sequencially. When Superman flies in the sky, if it's drawn in one single frame, that's a still picture. In Japanese comics, a character will fly in three frames while focused on head, body and foot. That's, I should say, the difference of production point-of-view, and I think without changing such a view of basic principles, American comics will face further decline.

FRANK: *In Japan, as I understand it, comic books have two names:* gekiga *and* manga. *Could you explain the difference in meaning between the two?*

KOJIMA: *Gekiga* was **Mr. Saito's** promoted word, trying to distinguish from *manga* more toward children. But, I don't really care. You can name mine anything.

FRANK: *American comics artists have mostly been subject to conditions of menial servitude to their publishers, up until very recently, and even now few comics artists are allowed to own the copyrights to their work. Generally, American comics artists are paid very little and treated like factory workers.*

KOJIMA: Is that so? It's just sounds like Japan 30 years ago. If you can't earn a living by drawing comics, do something else. I tried everything for a living — and that's taught me more about how to draw comics. Don't be aggrieved about it. You have to be curious.

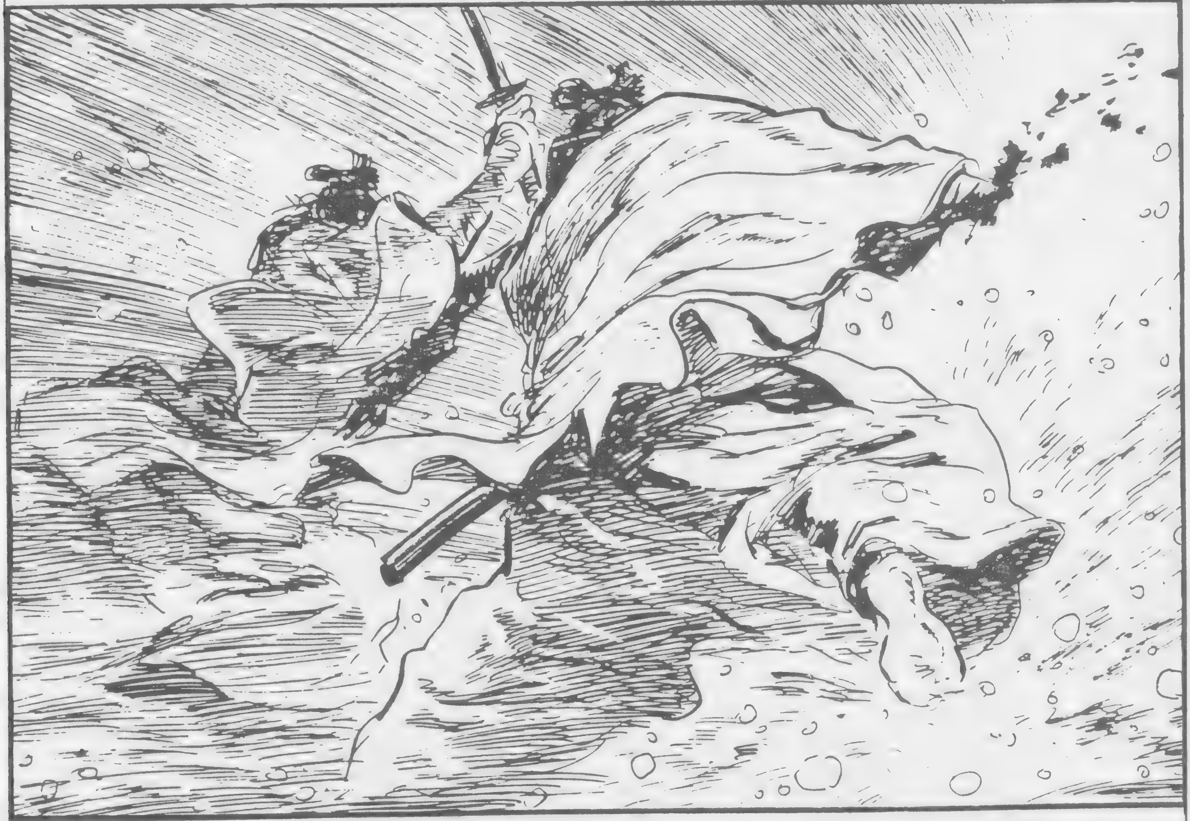
KOIKE: In Japan, before our generation rose in the comics world, it was just like in America. We have only experienced it 25 years eariler. We have a history of revolutionizing — moving comics, changing regulations — and made comics grow as a major mass media in Japan.

FRANK: *I've noticed, in Japanese editions of LONE WOLF, your beautiful watercolor work on covers and illustration. But your comics work itself, what I have been fortunate enough to see of it, has been done exclusively in black and white, as are almost all Japanese comic books. It's well known that Japanese printers are among the best in the world, and that Japanese magazines and books feature beautiful color reproduction, so I've been surprised at how few Japanese comics employ painted color.*

KOJIMA: Because Japanese color printing is expensive. But, I like black and white. Even movies, too — the color of movies is artificial. I was so shocked to see a classic film recently on TV in color.

FRANK: *I've heard that colored comics*

one, some day, will surpass me.”



are considered a corruption of the artform by some Japanese cartoonists. Is this the case? I ask this, mainly, because I've found working with Lynn Varley has made me feel that painted color can greatly expand the capabilities of the form. I'm eager to hear what you have to say about this.

KOJIMA: When requested to put color in my drawings, I don't mind doing it — it becomes more erotic.

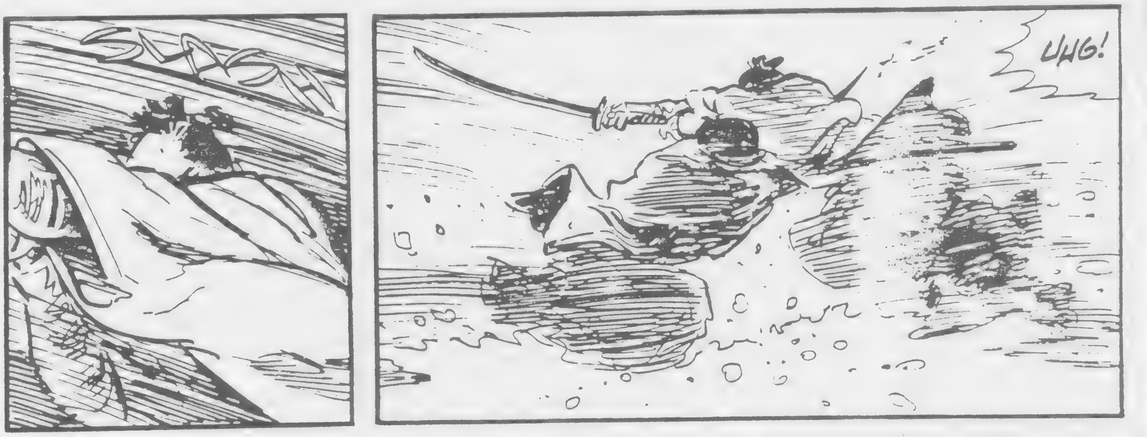
FRANK: *What other works have you produced, together and separately, and what chance do we have of seeing them in America?*

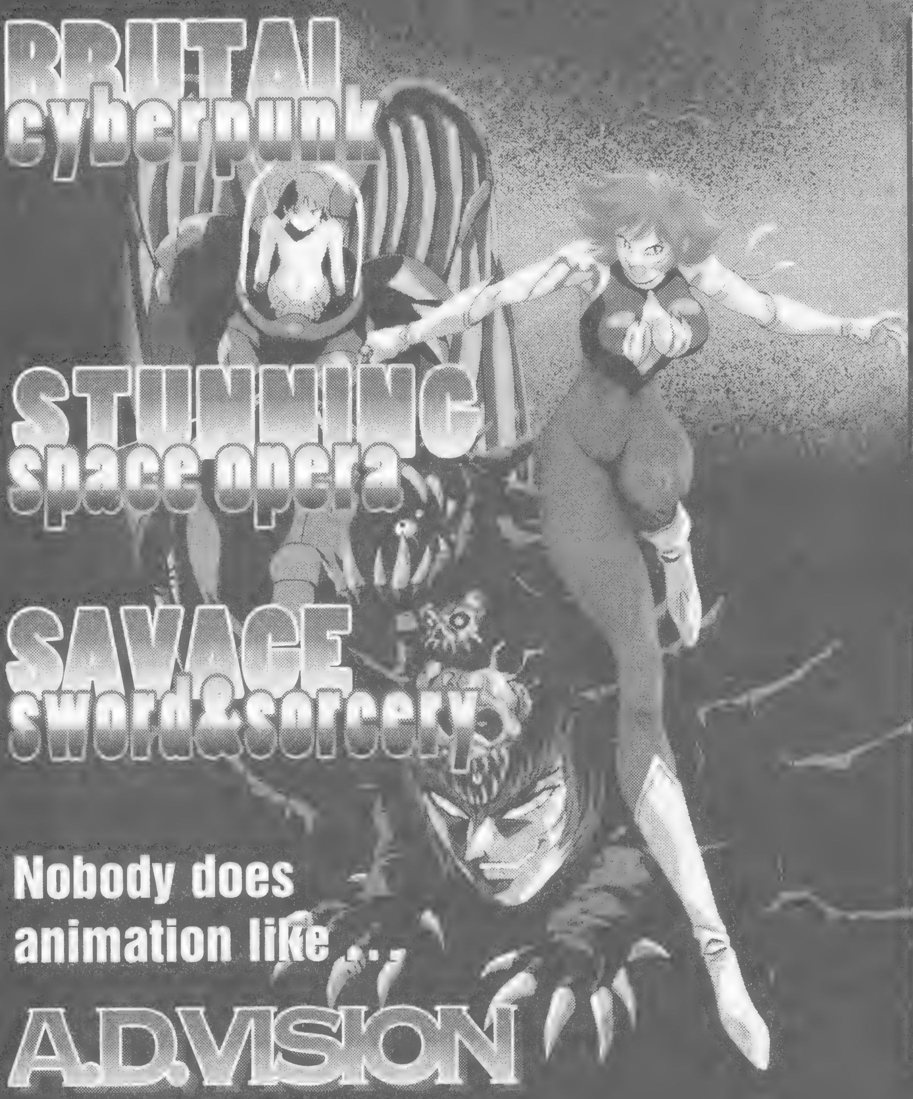
KOIKE: SPRING HAS COME might be popular in America. Because it's about retired Samuri couple and good for the senior age group. Also, HANZO-NO-MON and many others can be available forever, as long as you like our comics. As we in Japan enjoy the character of Dirty Harry or Beverly Hills Cops, Americans enjoy the character of Ogami-Itto, because neither country has such a character as the other. However, the character of Kamui was not strongly based on Japanese or Eastern ideas of Buddhism — it's just violence in a Western style. You have to have a strong identity, with backbone of culture, to be successful in the different culture.

FRANK: *Are you happy with the presentation of LONE WOLF in its American edition?*

KOIKE: Yes, I think it's very well done.

KOJIMA: Oh, I love it — especially the cover art. I don't like to read left to right, though.

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COMPANY PROFILE

In less than three short years, Houston-based A.D.Vision has become North America's fastest growing distributor of Japanese animation or "anime". With over eighty titles in various stages of release under the A.D.Vision and SoftCel Pictures video labels, the company has also recently branched into publishing with it's new Graphic Visions line of both translated and original Japanese-style manga and graphic novels, and a marketing division carrying model kits, CDs and original animation art and cels.

Formed in late 1992 by a group of dedicated Texas anime fans, A.D.Vision's highly original video releasing and marketing strategy was instrumental in breaking the "giant robot" stereotype that the then-new genre had begun to acquire. Beginning with the hugely successful DEVIL HUNTER YOHKO series, and continuing with the cyber-punk thrillers SOL BIANCA and BATTLE ANGEL, up to such recent smashes as Go Nagai's NEW CUTEY HONEY and KEKKO KAMEN limited series and PLASTIC LITTLE, A.D.Vision releases are noted for "pushing the edge of the envelope" in a genre already conducive to the wildest flights of fantasy, and with the release of the eagerly awaited SAMURAI SHODOWN-THE MOTION PICTURE, A.D.Vision has truly broken into the home video mainstream.

Although still in it's infancy, A.D.Vision's Graphic Visions line is seeking to duplicate the spirit of innovation that propelled it's video-sister labels success, and currently publishes a wide variety of both original and translated material. In addition to translations of the original mangas that inspired the SoftCel Pictures releases of MAGICAL TWILIGHT and DRAGON PINK, Graphic Visions is also releasing translated versions of the adult police drama SWEET COP and the horror anthology NIGHTMARE. The company is also publishing all-new original manga series based upon the hit videos BURN UP! and SOL BIANCA videos, the latter featuring astonishing computer augmented artwork by artist Lorraine Reyes, and FANIME, a quarterly animation "fan-zine" dedicated to exploring the more obscure aspects of anime fandom, written by fans, for fans.

"I'm a gallery painter. I have a gallery here in

DOUG
WILDEY

In the midst of life we are in death."

That's from THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, but I encountered it first in Stephen Vincent Benet's THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER. As an interviewer, I've discovered just how true that phrase is.

Wally Wood, Russ Manning, Gardner Fox, Alfred Bester: I made contact with or interviewed all of them. My articles or interviews appeared either not long before their deaths, or so close to their passing that their obituaries ran in the same month the pieces came out. I also knew a fine lady, Carol Kalish, for some years. She was taken away all too soon and I feel her loss, and Alfred's, most of all.

It's a standing joke among some of my friends in the business. I'm the Grim Reaper of COMICS INTERVIEW.

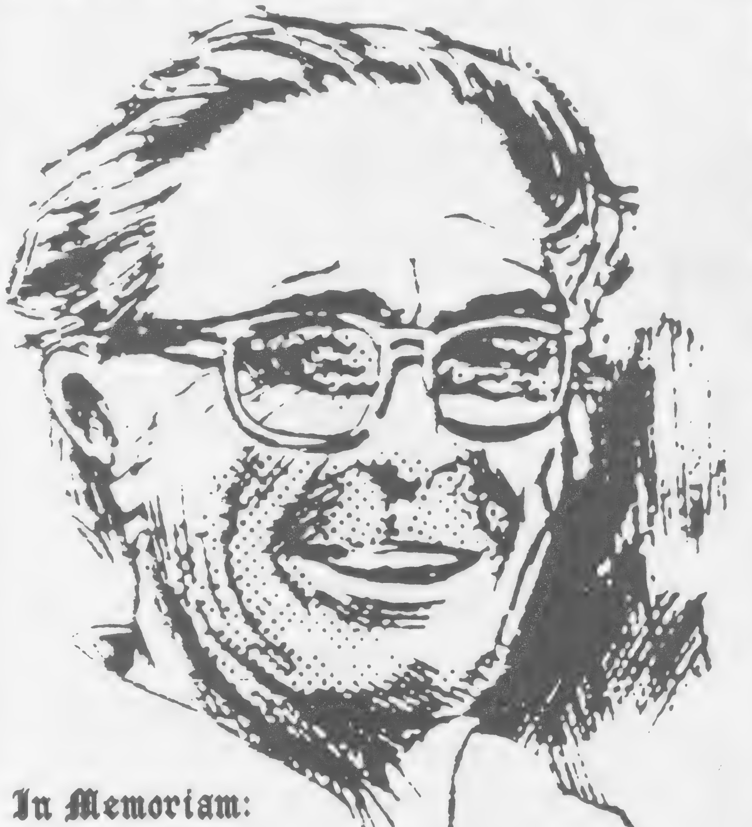
My beat, for the most part, is the men of the Golden Age and Silver Age. Every year, we lose another few men of those eras. They take history to their graves. Unless somebody gets to them before their time runs out, we lose that much knowledge and lore of the comics medium.

That's why I try to interview these pros before they die.

With Doug Wildey, we made it — just barely.

Doug had a 45-year career to boast of in comics, newspaper strips, animation, storyboarding, and painting. He did all of those things quite well. You know his work if you've watched JONNY QUEST on TV, or read his RIO graphic novels, or seen any of his various animated shows on Saturday mornings. Besides all that, Doug was an award-winning western painter, with exhibitions at various galleries in the United States and France. At one time or another, he worked for most of the majors in the comics business — DC, Marvel, Eclipse, Comico, Dark Horse, Avon, Street & Smith, Fawcett, Harvey, Dell/Gold key, Archie, Lev Gleason, Seaboard, and others. He also did THE SAINT newspaper strip, ghosted a few weeks of STEVE CANYON for Milt Caniff, and did several years' worth of his own strip, AMBLER.

It took some doing to get hold of Doug,



In Memoriam:
Doug Wildey
1922-1994

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Doug Wildey.
Born: 2 May 1922 — Yonkers, NY.
Family Configuration: Wife and two daughters.
Favorite TV Commercial I've Worked On: One for AT&T when rockets were first being sent up, with a rocket's blast coming into the screen and so forth..

Jonny Quest TM & ©1995 Ted Turner Broadcasting / Outlaw Kid TM & ©1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. / Rio ©1995 Doug & Ellen Wildey / Jonah Hex TM & ©1995 DC Comics, Inc. / The Martian Chronicles ©1950 Ray Bradbury.

town, and most of the stuff I do is westerns.”

with thanks to Susie at Eclipse, Cat Yronwode, Mark Evanier, and Ham-Bone. I had met Doug briefly at a few cons, and taken his picture once. (That shot should accompany this interview.) Since he was one of the patriarchs of comics and animation, I wanted to talk history with him.

So, a little over a month ago at this writing, I did the following interview with Doug Wildey. At the end of it, he told me that he had checked CI out with another pro, who told him it was "a good outfit." That was what decided him in favor of talking with me. It was an enjoyable experience, as you'll soon discover.

Doug edited the interview (with our permission) and sent it back to CI about two weeks ago.

Today I learned of his death.

What can I say? Shall we speak of his art, of his writing, of his long tenure in comics, newspaper strips, and cartoons? Shall we mention that he was one helluva nice guy? Shall we just dispense with the clichés and admit that, dammit, it just doesn't feel good to get to know these older gentlemen who, for the most part, really are gentlemen, and then have them snatched away in quick order by the demands of mortality?

Photo by Lou Mougin

It happens to us all.

The only thing I know to do about it is to seek out these men of the Golden and Silver Ages and let them tell their stories. Because, in the end, all we have is history. And if we do not speak with them in time, their history is dust.

Here's the interview . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *Can you tell us about your latest project, which, I assume, is the third RIO graphic novel?*

DOUG WILDEY: It's the fourth RIO graphic novel.

LOU: *I've lost count! Sorry. Tell me something about it.*

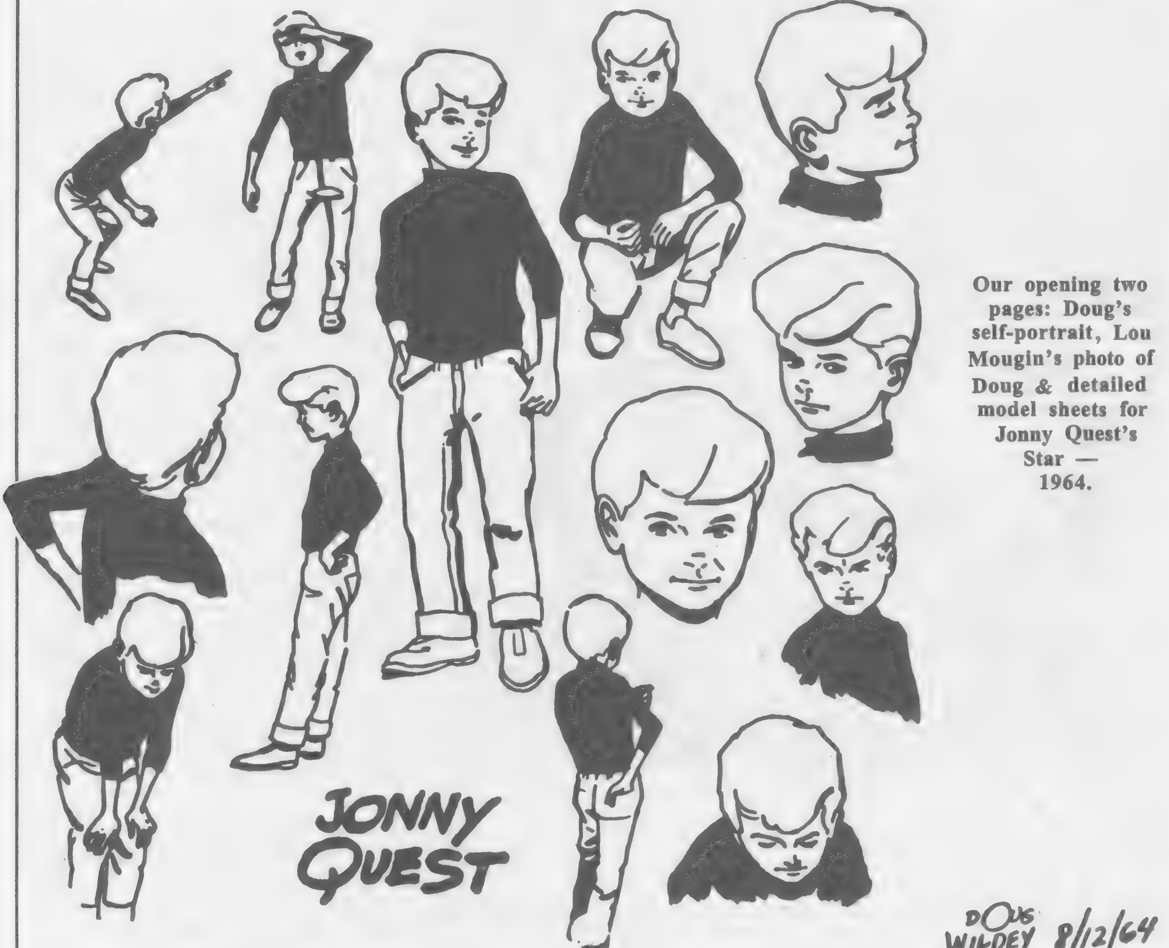
DOUG: Well, of all the westerns, I've always wanted to do a **Wyatt Earp** story. So I did a **Wyatt Earp** story.

LOU: *Rio gets to meet Wyatt Earp in this one?*

DOUG: Yeah.

LOU: *Is this the first time you've had a chance to draw Wyatt Earp, or have you done him before in the '50s?*

DOUG: I don't remember actually ever drawing **Wyatt Earp.** I drew some stories for the WYATT EARP book that Timely put out, but they weren't about



Our opening two pages: Doug's self-portrait, Lou Mougin's photo of Doug & detailed model sheets for Jonny Quest's Star — 1964.

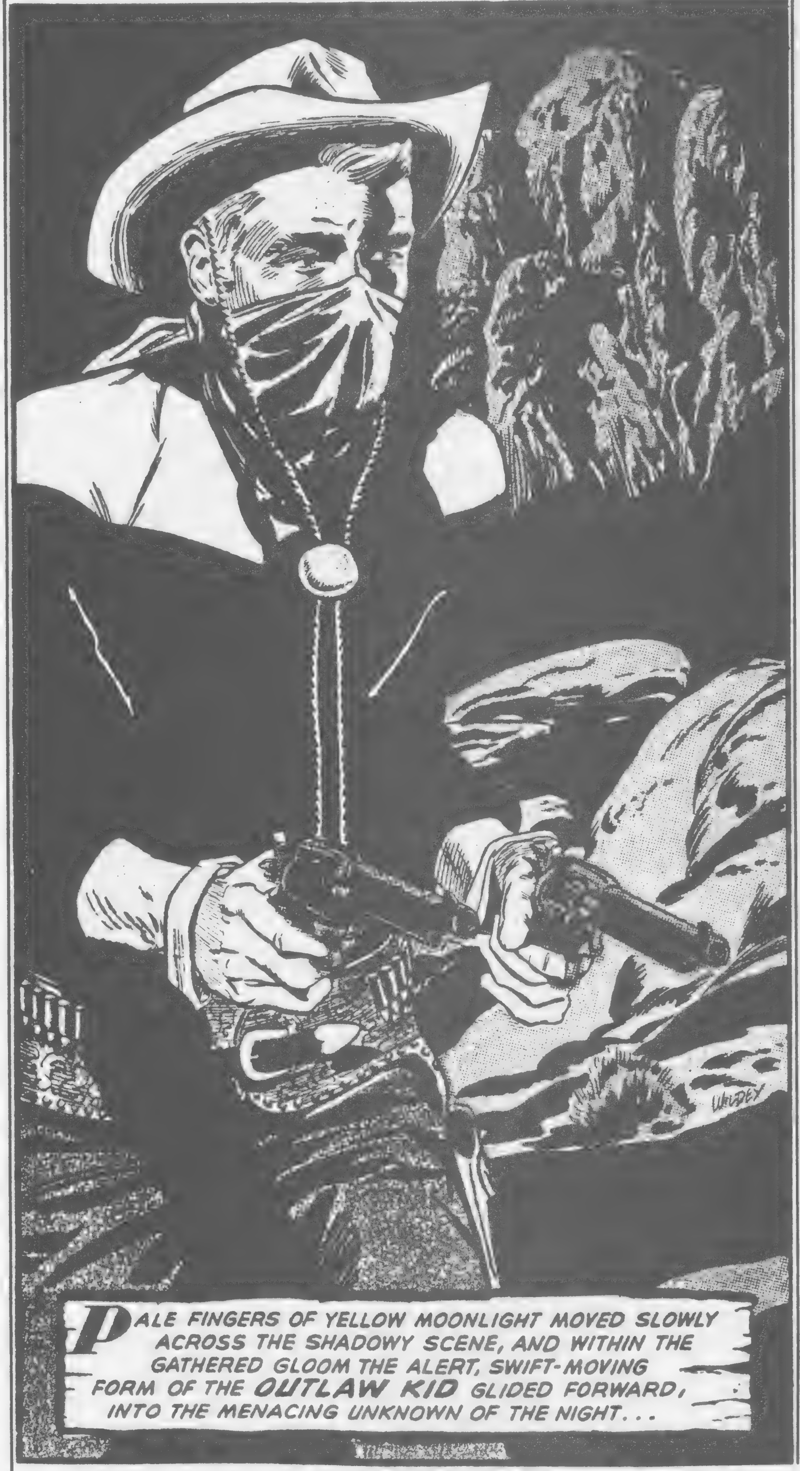
“I’ve done a lot of westerns over the years. They

Wyatt Earp. They were just western stories.

LOU: *So does Rio encounter Wyatt Earp as an adversary or a friend?*

DOUG: He starts out as a friend, and then decides he doesn’t like him too much. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Tell me something of the origin of Rio, how the character came to be, way back in the mid-’80s.*


PALE FINGERS OF YELLOW MOONLIGHT MOVED SLOWLY ACROSS THE SHADOWY SCENE, AND WITHIN THE GATHERED GLOOM THE ALERT, SWIFT-MOVING FORM OF THE OUTLAW KID GLIDED FORWARD, INTO THE MENACING UNKNOWN OF THE NIGHT...
WILDEY

DOUG: Well, I’ve done a lot of the westerns over the years, in the early ’50s and the ’60s and so forth. They were always pretty crummy. *(Laughter.)* They were written by **Stan Lee** or somebody, and there wasn’t much to them. I assume you know I’m a gallery painter. I have a gallery here in town called Unique, and most of the stuff that I do is westerns. As a matter of fact, they just put out two of my paintings as prints.

LOU: *I’ve heard you’ve done pretty well with the paintings, too.*

DOUG: I’ve done okay. It’s a nice living. Anyway, to get back to Rio — at the time, I believe I was still doing my comic strip, AMBLER. It was about to fold up. I didn’t like the syndicate that was handling it, so I got it back. I still own it. And I hadn’t done comic books in a long time, but I had read someplace where they started this business about some publishers sharing ownership and profits with the creators and such. So I figured, okay, I’ll come up with a western. And I came up with Rio. Basically, that’s how it evolved.

LOU: *So you got that into ECLIPSE MONTHLY with their first issue.*

DOUG: Actually, it was another outfit, in Florida. **Richard Howell** was the editor.

LOU: *Oh, yeah. ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED, from New Media.*

DOUG: And they went out of business, and a guy from Eclipse saw the work and called me. I hadn’t finished the story at the time. He made a deal with the people in Florida, and bought the whole thing from them.

LOU: *I was impressed with the strip when I saw it. It reminded me a little of LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY. I also find it encouraging that you’re able to get a western character out there and make it work, since the genre has fallen on harder times in comics even than it did in the movies until recently. Do you have any theories on why westerns have had such a hard time making it recently?*

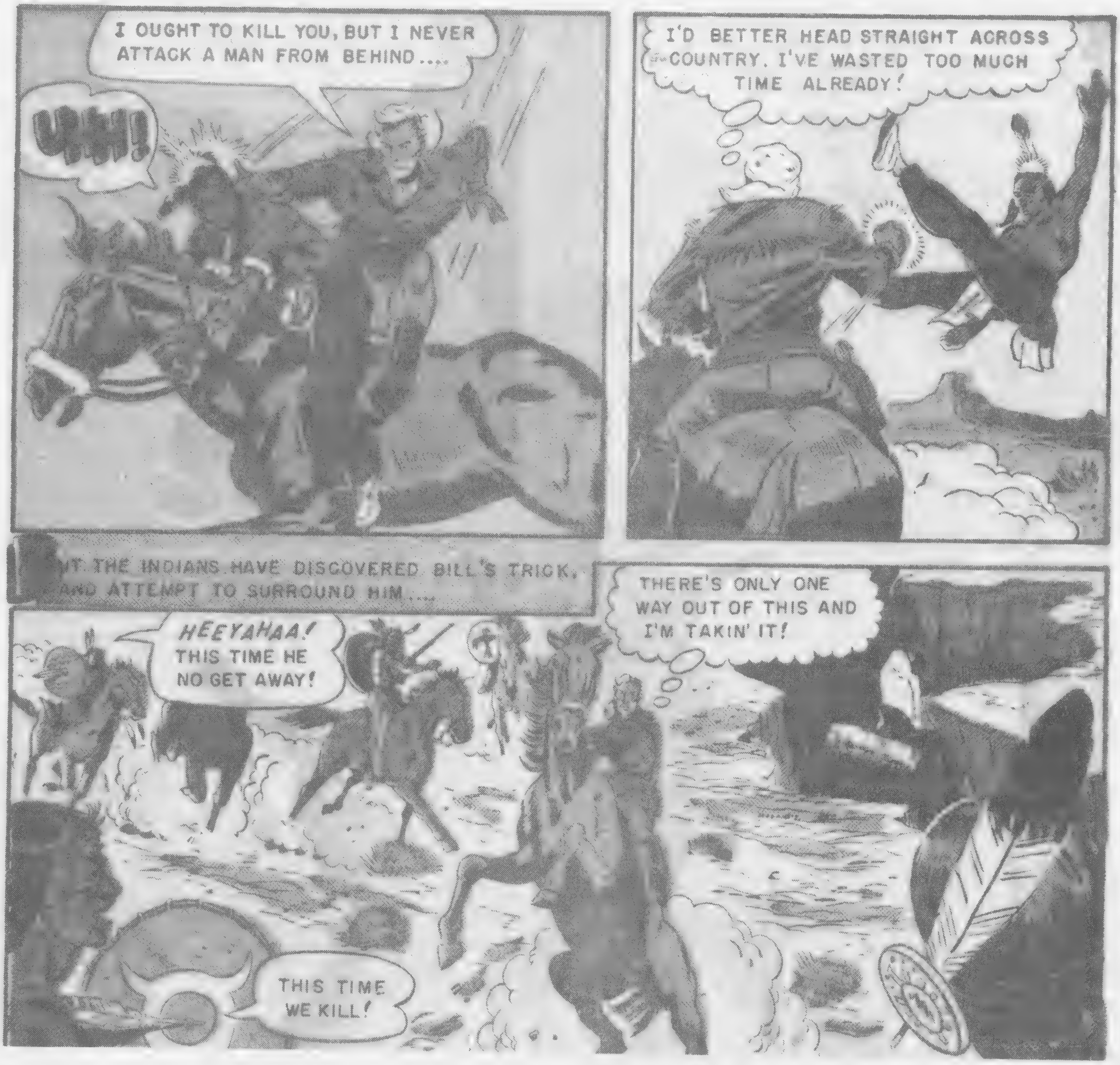
DOUG: Well, I don’t think any of the comics publishers are exactly rocket scientists. *(Laughter.)* They’ll just simply go with what they figure is gonna sell, and in today’s market, it’s superheroes, which I hate. As a matter of fact, I’m looking for a publisher for RIO #4.

LOU: *You mean, Dark Horse has bowed out?*

DOUG: I think they have.

LOU: *Well, if anybody who’s reading this wants to publish it, get in contact with Doug! I’d certainly like to see it.*

DOUG: I get some fan mail on it. Not as were always pretty crummy. (Laughter.)"


I OUGHT TO KILL YOU, BUT I NEVER ATTACK A MAN FROM BEHIND....
UGH!
I'D BETTER HEAD STRAIGHT ACROSS COUNTRY. I'VE WASTED TOO MUCH TIME ALREADY!
UT THE INDIANS HAVE DISCOVERED BILL'S TRICK, AND ATTEMPT TO SURROUND HIM....
HEEYAHAA! THIS TIME HE NO GET AWAY!
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT OF THIS AND I'M TAKIN' IT!
THIS TIME WE KILL!

Here: One of Doug's earliest comic-book jobs: BUFFALO BILL. This was for the now-defunct Street & Smith. Previous page: THE OUTLAW KID in "Trail's End." Says Doug: "I did [THE OUTLAW KID] about three years. I got married and moved on the strength of that comic book."

much as on my television stuff, but I do get fan mail on RIO. They all like it and they claim they'd like to see it — but, so far, no publishing.

LOU: *Backtracking to your earlier days, I read that you specifically got interested in becoming an artist during your World War II days, drawing for the base newspaper.*

DOUG: Yeah, I was the base newspaper cartoonist.

LOU: *Did you draw a strip, or just have a cartoon?*

DOUG: I think the newspaper was a monthly, and nobody else in the unit could draw pictures, so I did.

LOU: *I remember that several comics artists started out by that route, such as Dick Ayers. Had you done some illustrations for pulp magazines before this?*

DOUG: Yeah, for Street & Smith. I believe they were the only one.

LOU: *And your first comic-book work was BUFFALO BILL, also for Street & Smith?*

DOUG: That's correct. I had shown them some samples. I did up two comic pages and brought them over. They gave me the whole book! 52 pages for ten cents. It was a bad job, but I guess everybody starts out very poorly. They even gave me a second one. And in the middle of the second one, they folded up their comics and pulps division.

LOU: *So you only did a couple of issues of BUFFALO BILL?*

DOUG: Actually, I only did one that came out.

LOU: *You seem to have done the rounds of the various publishers in the early '50s, mainly doing westerns, but also a few crime, horror, and love comics, too. Can you tell me something about those times?*

DOUG: There was an outfit whose name I don't recall, probably Hillman, who did something called TOP SECRET. I did a couple of stories with them. Then I did a couple of crime stories for some other outfit.

LOU: *Was that Charlie Biro?*

“I showed up every Thursday, because if you missed

DOUG: No, it wasn't **Biro,** whose work I actually liked. I kind of liked the crime things that he did . . . not so much the writing, but the art of **George Tuska.**

LOU: *Yeah, George was in his best period then, I think.*

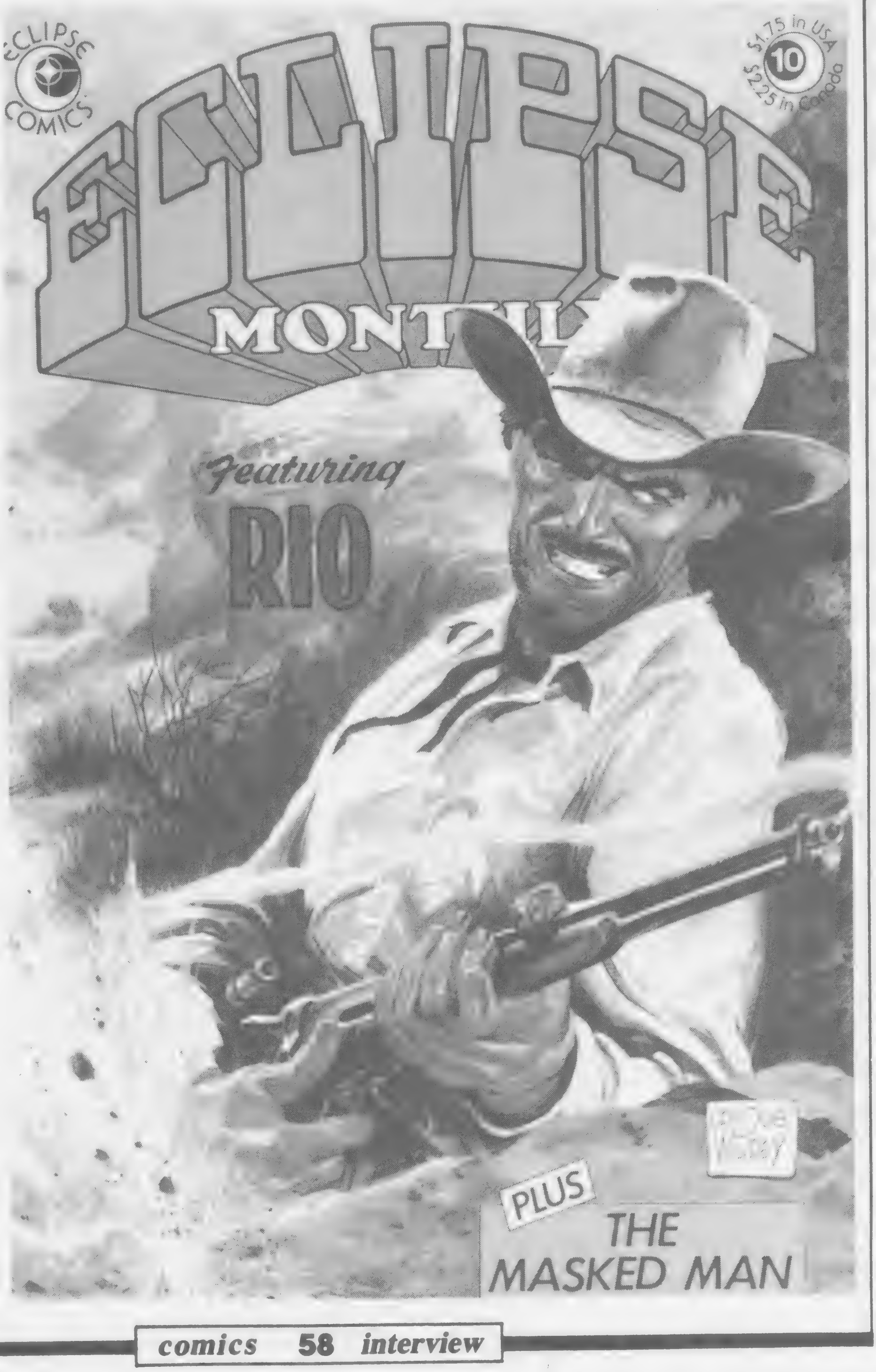
DOUG: Uh huh.

LOU: *And I've got you down as working on the BUSTER CRABBE book from Lev Gleason.*

DOUG: Yeah, I did one BUSTER CRABBE book.

LOU: *Around that time, I guess, you went to work at Marvel for Stan Lee, doing all the westerns like OUTLAW KID, RINGO KID, and KID COLT. What was it like, working for Stan back then?*

DOUG: It was okay. I didn't really see Stan much. I just made sure I showed up every Thursday, because if you missed Thursday you had to wait a week to get paid. *(Laughter.)* I remember, of course, THE OUTLAW KID. I did that thing about three years. I can't recall the name



ECLIPSE MONTHLY — with another installment of Doug's RIO (cover, too). Issue #10 is from July, 1984. As Doug put it: “I read somewhere where they . . .

Thursday you had to wait a week to get paid."

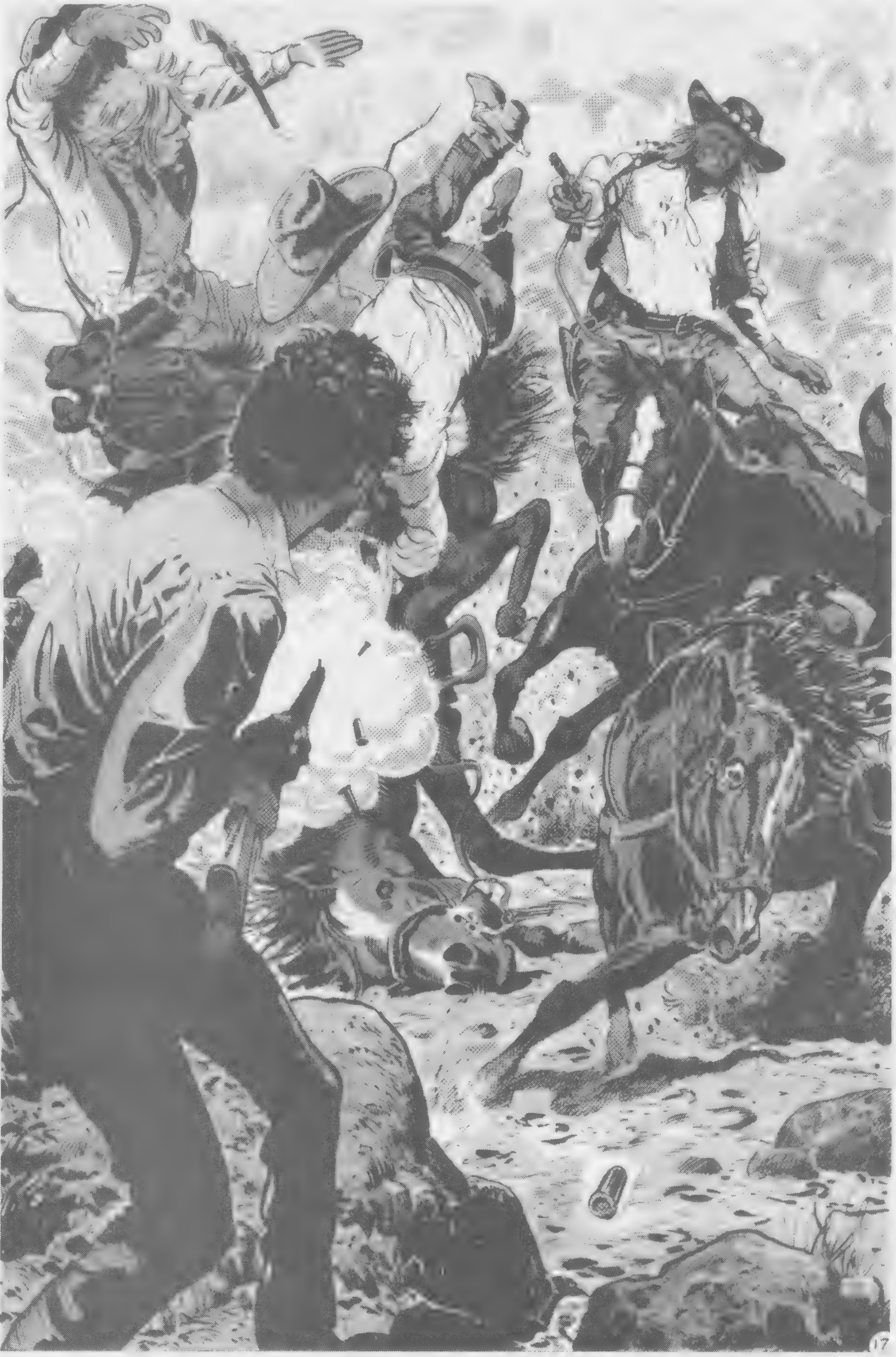
of the guy who wrote it, but it seemed to be a pseudonym for **Stan Lee** or somebody else. Matter of fact, I got married and moved down to Arizona just on the strength of that comic book.

LOU: *With the westerns being so big back in the early '50s, I'll bet you didn't have any problem getting work.*

DOUG: No. As a matter of fact, I've rarely had any problem getting work.

LOU: *I'm going to get to your animated work in a moment, but first I want to talk to you about your work on the syndicated strips, THE SAINT and STEVE CANYON.*

DOUG: Actually, I was down at the syndicate. I had an auto-racing strip I was trying to sell, like every other guy in the world. *(Laughter.)* They didn't buy it, but they evidently remembered the work. And one of the guys down at the syndicate called **Caniff**, and **Caniff** called me and offered me this ghost job on STEVE CANYON. And I was into that when the syndicate got back to me with THE SAINT. So all of a sudden, I was doing two comic strips, both dailies and Sun-



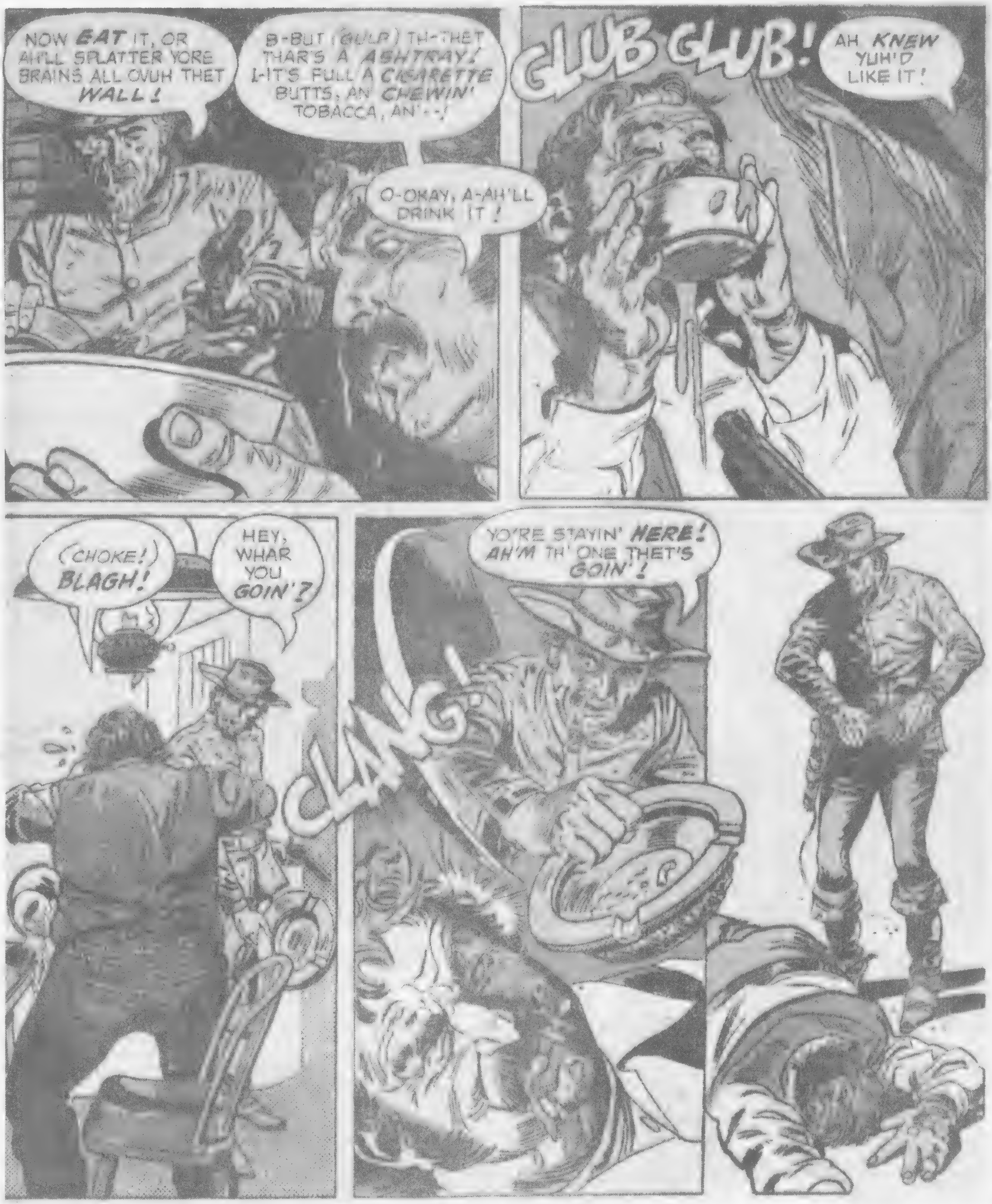
. . . started this business about some publishers sharing ownership and profits with the creators and such. So I figured, okay, I'll come up with a western. And I came up with RIO."

"I didn't have any help, so I just slept in shifts."

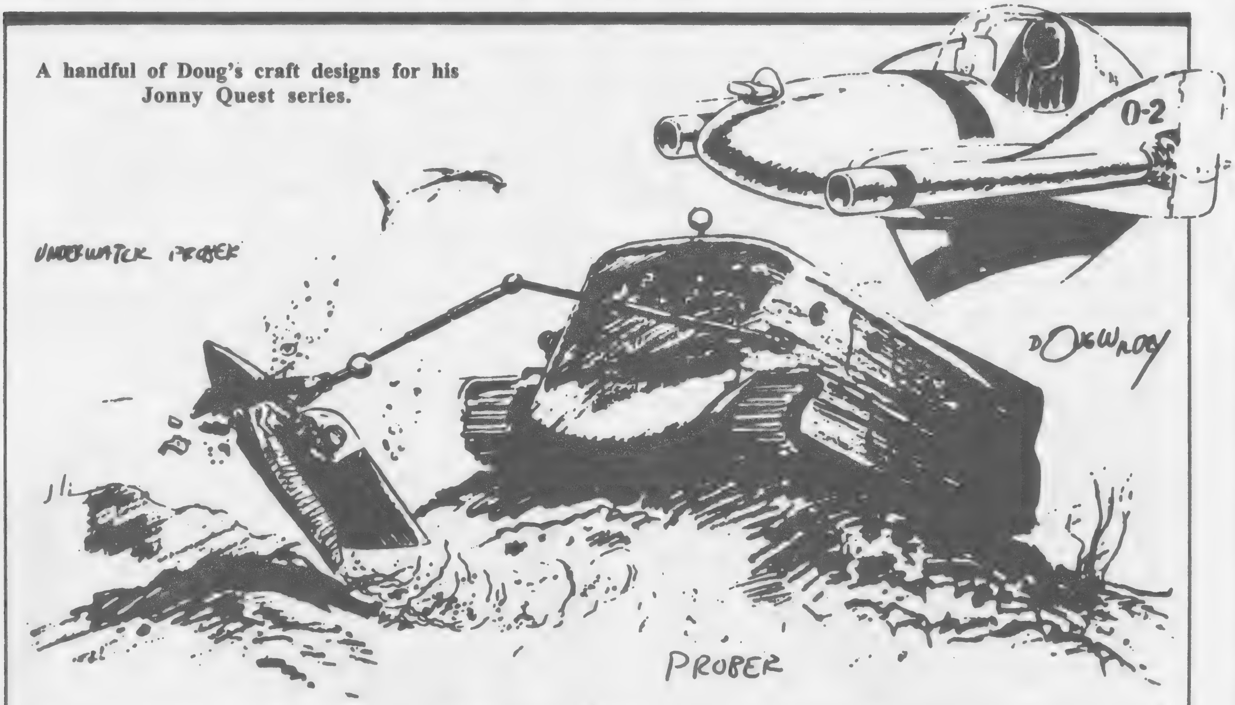
days. I didn't have any help, so I just slept in shifts. I didn't know if it was night or day. *(Laughter.)* Milt went to the Far East on vacation, the first time he'd ever been there. I ghosted the STEVE CANYON strip six or seven weeks, and I also had THE SAINT. When Milt came back, he took over STEVE CANYON again, so I just had THE SAINT.

THE SAINT was nothing, really, more than a ploy, I believe. The author of the SAINT books, **Leslie Charteris**, actually wrote it. At the time, he had television deals and THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE. So he didn't really put too much work into the comic strip; he just used it as a means of keeping the character in public view.

A little-known mini-classic that Doug did as a fill-in for WEIRD WESTERN TALES #26 — full pencils, inks and zip-a-toning — February, 1975.


NOW EAT IT, OR AH'LL SPLATTER YORE BRAINS ALL OVUH THET WALL!
B-BUT (GULP) TH-THET THAR'S A ASHTRAY! I-IT'S FULL A CIGARETTE BUTTS, AN' CHEWIN' TOBACCA, AN'--!
O-OKAY, A-AH'LL DRINK IT!
GLUB GLUB!
AH KNEW YUH'D LIKE IT!
(CHOKE!) BLAGH!
HEY, WHAR YOU GOIN'?
YO'RE STAYIN' HERE! AH'M TH' ONE THET'S GOIN'!
CLANG!

"Alex Toth hired me for a week. I went out and started."


A handful of Doug's craft designs for his Jonny Quest series.

LOU: *Making some money, too.*

DOUG: I presume so. I don't know; I never met the man. The deal was, at the time I made it, I had heard a couple of stories on how he had given one artist an actual breakdown, always bugging him and being hypercritical, and so forth.

LOU: *You mean, he gave him a* nervous *breakdown?*

DOUG: Yeah.

LOU: (Laughter.) *For a moment there, I thought you meant he did breakdowns of the art.*

DOUG: So, when I made the deal with the syndicate, I worked it so that I worked *for* the syndicate, with them always being the buffer between myself and **Mr. Charteris.** It turned out to be a brilliant idea, one of my very few.

LOU: So the syndicate took all the nagging phone calls, and you just got to work on the strip?

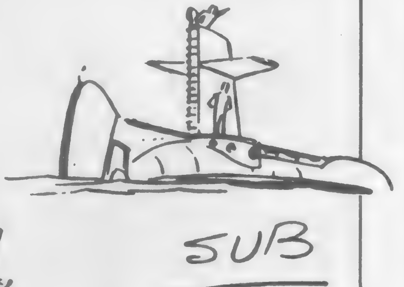
DOUG: That's correct. That's the only way it could be worked, because there wasn't enough money in the thing. They didn't pay me all that much. It was just a thing in which I figured, "Well, I can always use this job." But not at any kind of mental expense. So that was the way it worked out.

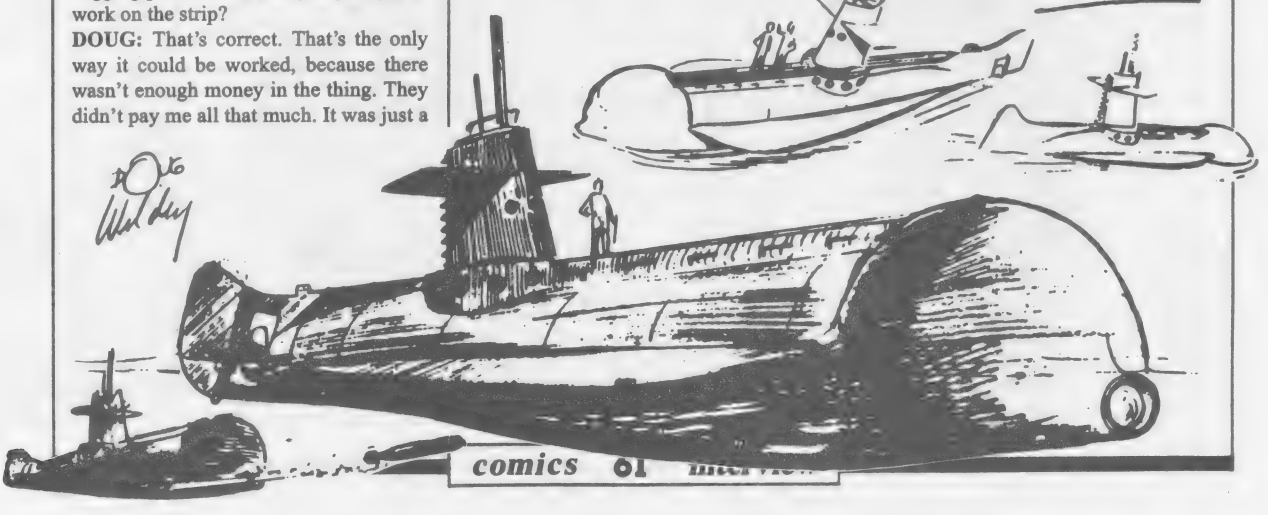
LOU: *Okay, now we're gonna talk animation. According to Jerry Bails' WHO'S WHO OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS, you started out with SPACE ANGEL in 1962. I remember that I liked it, but that it had very limited animation. Can you tell me something about how you got into that?*

DOUG: I answered an ad. **Alex Toth** was running the place, and he put an ad in the house organ of the National Cartoonists Society, of which I was a member. I gave him a call. He was in California, and I was in Arizona. He hired me for a week, and I went out and started.

LOU: *Was that one week the extent of your involvement with SPACE ANGEL?*

DOUG: Oh, no. I worked on that one probably eight or ten weeks. It was all drawing. Actually, there was no animation. They had a process called Synchro-Vox, whereby they put non-photographable blue over the face of an actor, and then photographed his lips as he would read the lines off of the script. Then they





“I came up with three characters: Race, Jonny, Dr.

would project the lips onto the drawing.

LOU: *I remember seeing those things. I thought it was kind of weird.*

DOUG: Yeah, it was.

LOU: *Now, the question we've all been waiting for: JONNY QUEST. Can you tell me a whole bunch about your work on JONNY QUEST?*

DOUG: After SPACE ANGEL, they didn't get a pick-up on the series. They didn't have any more shows, and I was out of a job. I went over the hill to the Valley, and I happened to get into **Stanley Kramer's** outfit and showed them my samples. I thought that I would become a storyboard artist, or possibly a production designer. I just missed by a hair getting hired by **Kramer's** outfit. So I went up the hill to Hanna-Barbera, and showed my samples there. They had never seen straight art before; they'd only done comic stuff — funny animals and FLINTSTONES.

LOU: *Right, HUCKLEBERRY HOUND and YOGI BEAR and all that stuff.*

DOUG: Yeah. So they put me on something, which was somebody fighting a robot on the Moon. I don't quite recall it. They hired me and put me on staff. Then they got the rights to JACK ARMSTRONG, THE ALL-AMERICAN BOY.

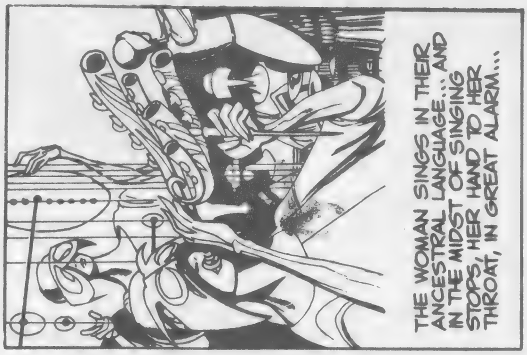
LOU: *Oh, that's one I didn't know about.*

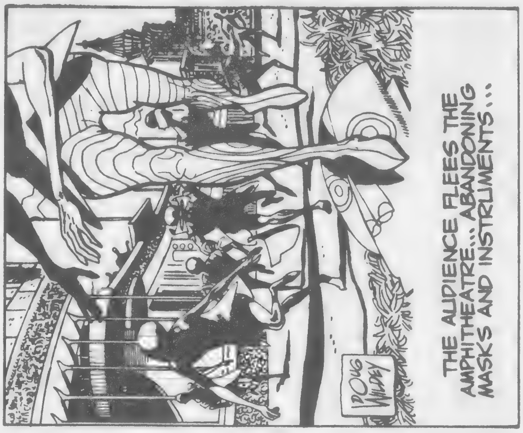
DOUG: So I put in about three months doing various things, commercials and whatever. But I also did JACK ARMSTRONG.

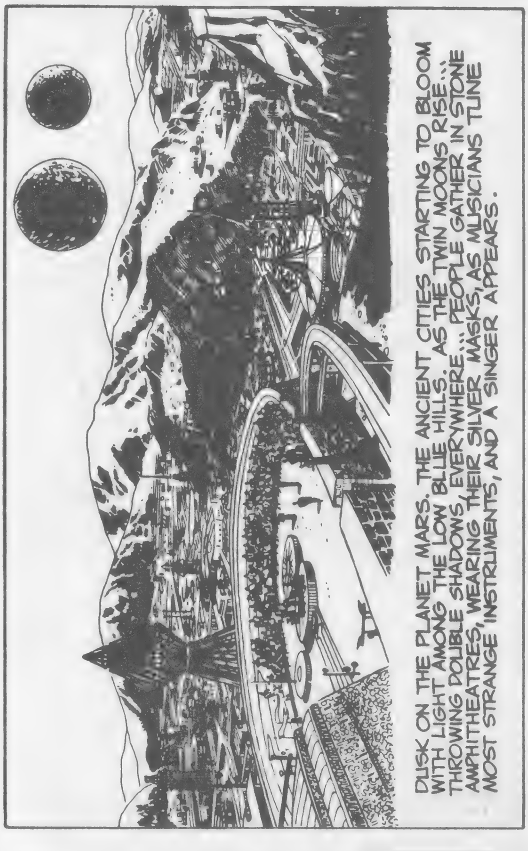
LOU: *You mean, there really was a JACK ARMSTRONG cartoon that came out?*

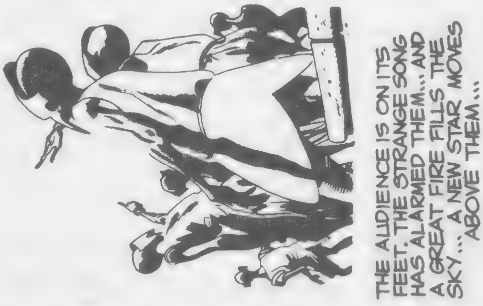
DOUG: I'll get to that. I wrote the JACK ARMSTRONG cartoon and did some artwork on it. They liked it enough to actually animate a piece of the artwork. We got as far as me listening to all the voices on the tape, and picking the voices for what I assumed were the closest things to the characters.

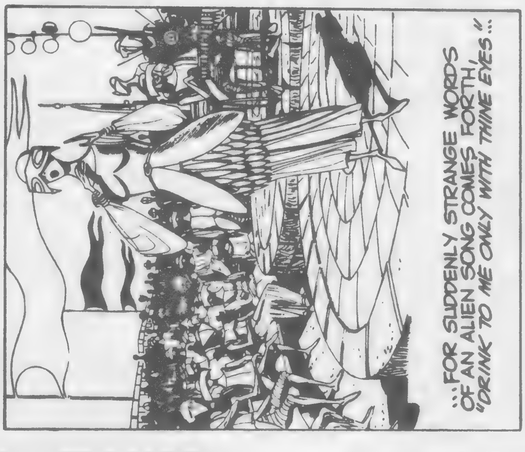
Then they decided that as long as I was

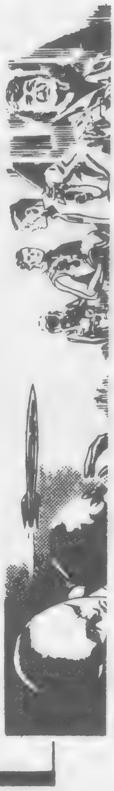

THE WOMAN SINGS IN THEIR ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE... AND IN THE MIDST OF SINGING STOPS, HER HAND TO HER THROAT, IN GREAT ALARM...


THE AUDIENCE FLEES THE AMPHITHEATRE... ABANDONING MASKS AND INSTRUMENTS...
DOUG WILDEY


DUSK ON THE PLANET MARS. THE ANCIENT CITIES STARTING TO BLOOM WITH LIGHT AMONG THE LOW BLUE HILLS, AS THE TWIN MOONS RISE... THROWING DOUBLE SHADOWS EVERYWHERE... PEOPLE GATHER IN STONE AMPHITHEATRES, WEARING THEIR SILVER MASKS, AS MUSICIANS TUNE MOST STRANGE INSTRUMENTS, AND A SINGER APPEARS.


THE AUDIENCE IS ON ITS FEET. THE STRANGE SONG HAS ALARMED THEM... AND A GREAT FIRE FILLS THE SKY... A NEW STAR MOVES ABOVE THEM...


...FOR SUDDENLY STRANGE WORDS OF AN ALIEN SONG COMES FORTH, "DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES"...



Quest. The idea: Kid, famous father, adventures."

in the studio, I was an executive there. Middle-level. And **Joe Barbera** just said, "Create one for us!" It was partially, I guess, because I was there, and partially because the JACK ARMSTRONG people wanted too much money. So, at the end of the JONNY QUEST shows, over the credits, there's a sequence of a hovercraft going into an airplane. The doors open, and some natives are throwing spears. that was actually the part that was animated for JACK ARMSTRONG. They just put that in there in the end, as a little filler. That was the start of the project. After that, I just wrote, drew, and storyboarded, generally reading all the science magazines, trying to come up with some stuff that we figured would be ten years ahead of our current technology.

LOU: *Did you come up with the characters for the JONNY QUEST series?*

DOUG: All of 'em.

LOU: *Can you tell us something about how you came up with Jonny, Race, Mr. Quest, Hadji, and all that good stuff?*

DOUG: That, again, goes back to JACK ARMSTRONG. At the time, as I recall, the JACK ARMSTRONG radio show had Jack, Billy, Betty, and Uncle Jim. Four characters on the radio. I came up with three characters: Race, Jonny, and Dr. Quest. The idea was for this kid to follow his famous scientist father all around the world and to have adventures.

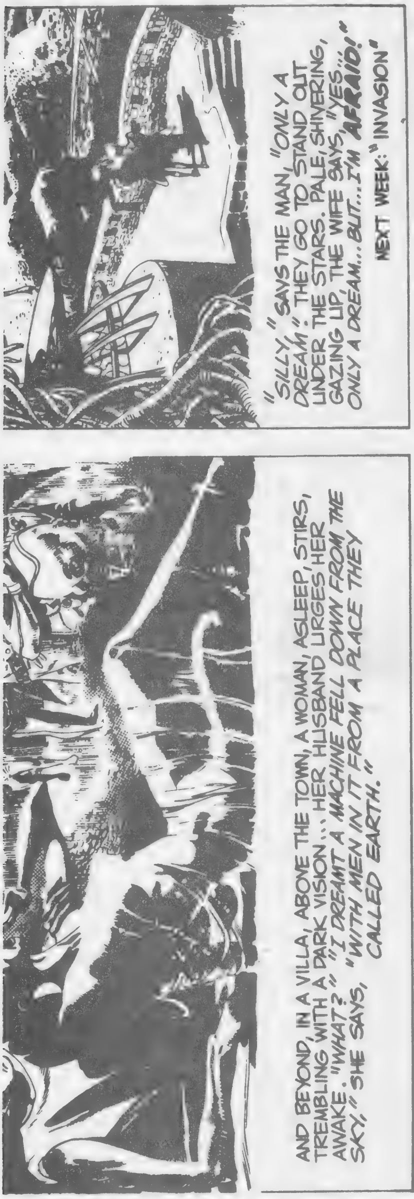
Hanna Barbera was very nervous about this kind of work. They didn't have that many people who could draw this kind of thing.

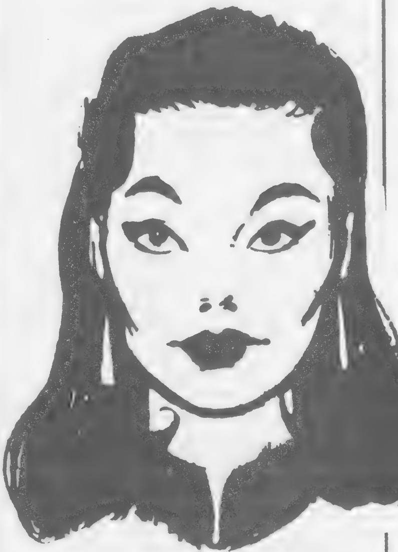
LOU: *They couldn't draw straight characters?*

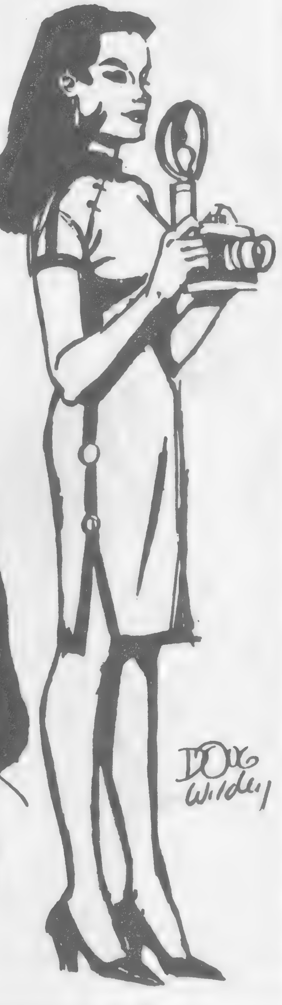
DOUG: Right. So they put the dog, Bandit, in it. Because Bandit was a cartoon dog. Bandit somehow, to me, never really fit that series.

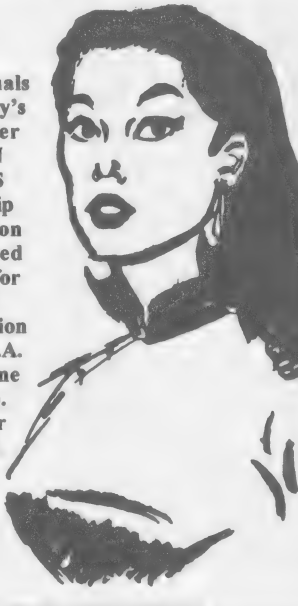
LOU: *He was the comic relief, wasn't he?*

DOUG: Well, there was that, but it was mainly because most of the animation footage went into Bandit. The staff had people who knew how to draw that kind of thing. Also, they were very big into toys at the time. And while I was putting JONNY QUEST together, the idea was that the kid would have a pet. I always wanted a monkey, because a monkey could crawl through small air shafts and


AND BEYOND, IN A VILLA, ABOVE THE TOWN, A WOMAN, ASLEEP, STIRS, TREMBLING WITH A DARK VISION... HER HUSBAND URGES HER AWAKE. "WHAT?" "I DREAMT A MACHINE FELL DOWN FROM THE SKY," SHE SAYS, "WITH MEN IN IT FROM A PLACE THEY CALLED EARTH."
"SILLY," SAYS THE MAN, "ONLY A DREAM." THEY GO TO STAND OUT UNDER THE STARS. PALE, SHIVERING, GAZING UP, THE WIFE SAYS, "YES... ONLY A DREAM... BUT... I'M AFRAID!"
NEXT WEEK: "INVASION"

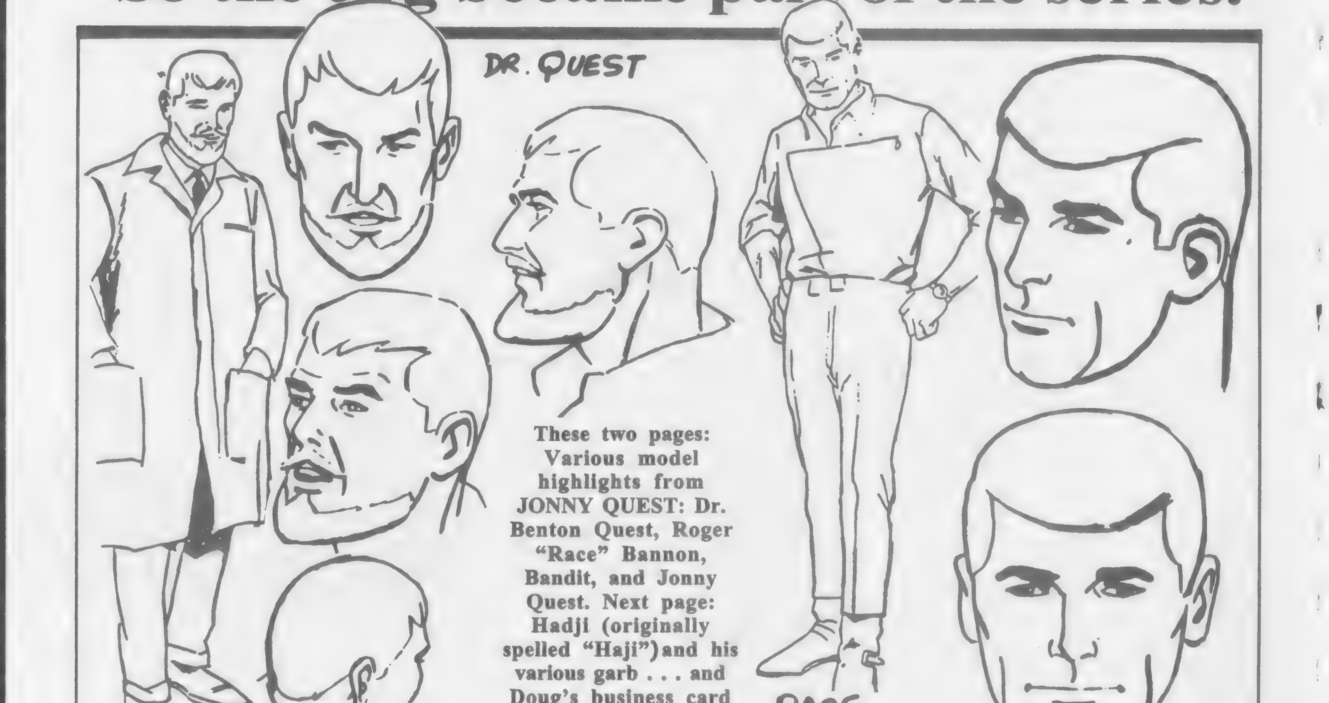



Doug Wildey



Left: Doug's visuals for Ray Bradbury's classic best-seller THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES (1950) — in strip form! This version was commissioned in 1972 by and for the old WEST MAGAZINE section of the Sunday L.A. Times (this is one of three pages). Right: Another QUEST model sheet: "Night Club Photog," as indicated by Doug.

"So the dog became part of the series."



These two pages: Various model highlights from JONNY QUEST: Dr. Benton Quest, Roger "Race" Bannon, Bandit, and Jonny Quest. Next page: Hadji (originally spelled "Haji")and his various garb . . . and Doug's business card (before moving in the late '80s).

such like that as an adventure thing, and bring back a key or tool or something. But somebody called Joe and told him they could make a deal on a bulldog puppy. And that was the end of that. So the dog became part of the series.

I was only writing this thing for a little while before I realized, "Oh, my God, I've got a boy-and-his-dog story here for 26 episodes!" *(Laughter.)* And I couldn't do that. So I immediately created Hadji, with this Eastern, Indian background, so that Jonny would have a kid of his own age to play off of. We wrote one story about how they picked up Hadji, and it worked.

LOU: *Yeah, that one was adapted in JONNY QUEST CLASSICS #2. In fact, all the three JONNY QUEST CLASSICS were adapted by you from your own cartoons.*

DOUG: That's right. And while we're on the subject, that was a very tough thing to do. I had no idea how tough that was!

DOUG: You mean adapting the stories for the comics?

DOUG: Right, because in animation I could write stuff that I knew would take up screen time and, hopefully, be reasonably interesting to an audience. It wasn't that tough. But to take the same thing, put it into a 23-page comic book, and have the story come out the same was very tough. I had no idea it was going to be that difficult.

LOU: *Yeah, you had to chop out so much material, I imagine. Just try and hit the high points.*

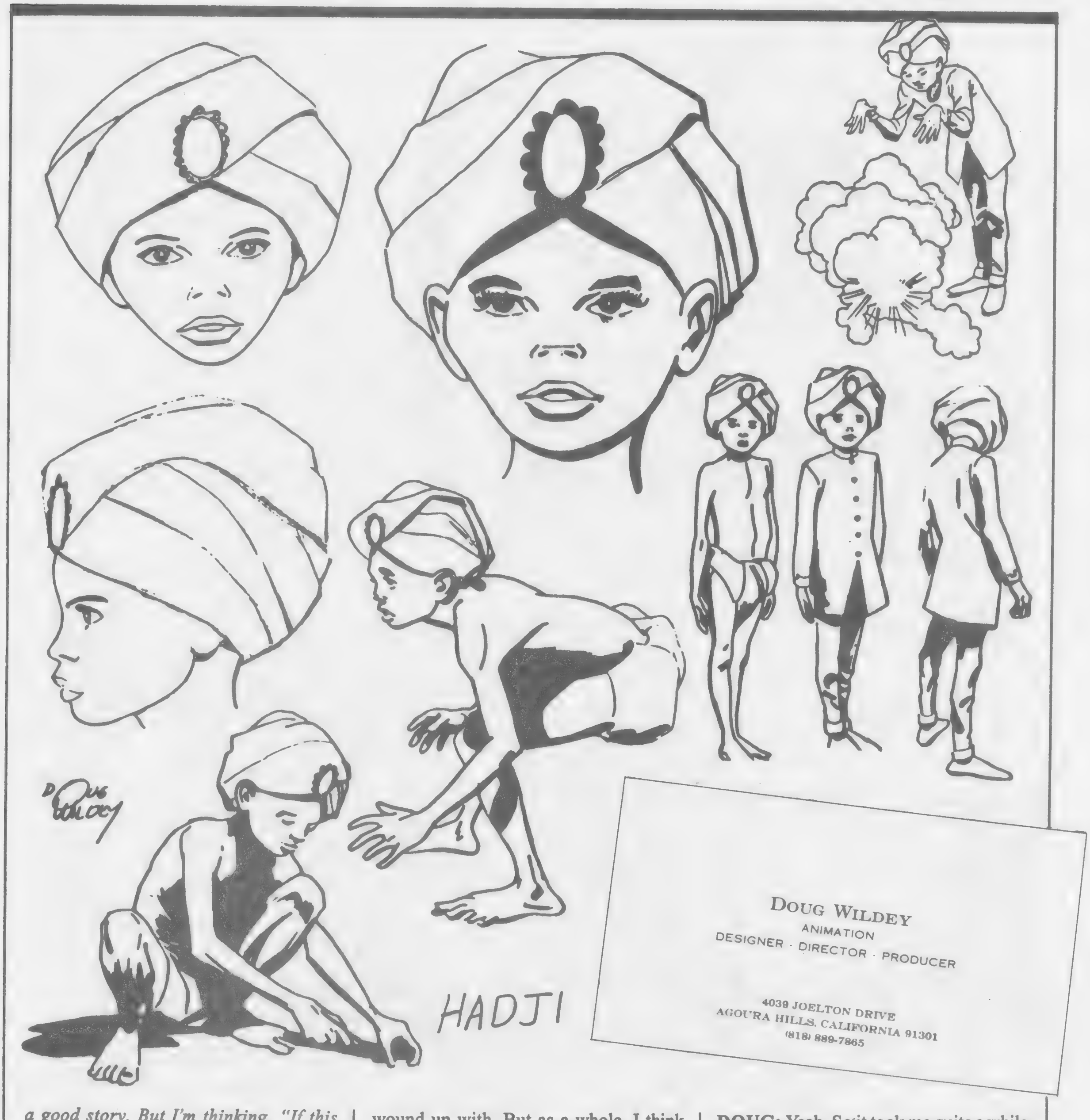
DOUG: Yeah, that's correct.

LOU: *You know, one thing I was struck by, just rereading those things today, in issue #1, where they have the aerial dogfight—*

DOUG: That was my favorite story.

LOU: *Yeah, and it was well done; it was*

"It took a while to convince Joe not to call it J.Q. 037."



Doug Wildey
ANIMATION
DESIGNER · DIRECTOR · PRODUCER

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AGOURA HILLS, CALIFORNIA 91301
(818) 889-7865

a good story. But I'm thinking, "If this thing is set in 1987, and the German Baron is a Von Richthofen type who had been a flying ace, that would probably make him over 90 years old, probably close to 100!" And in 1967 it might be believable, but can we really believe that a 100-year-old bad guy can get up in that plane and have a dogfight with Race Bannon?

DOUG: Well, it was actually 1964. It was within the realm of possibility back then.

LOU: *Yeah, in '64 it would have been.*

DOUG: In that particular script, I had a little bit more to it than we actually wound up with. But as a whole, I think that that was the best show we did.

LOU: *Yeah, it was a good one. I have to admit, though, that Race Bannon reminds me a bit of Pat Ryan in TERRY AND THE PIRATES.*

DOUG: Yeah, and you're not too far off. I very frankly admit that that happened to be one of my favorite comic strips. It wasn't too far off in that sense. Also, the difference is that, when we started doing JONNY QUEST, **Joe Barbera** suddenly got hooked on a movie called DOCTOR NO.

LOU: *Oh, yeah! The first James Bond movie.*

DOUG: Yeah. So it took me quite a while to convince Joe not to call this show JONNY QUEST 037. *(Laughter.)* He wanted this number and some spy stuff in it.

LOU: *So he wanted Jonny to be a kid spy?*

DOUG: Yeah, kind of. Eventually, we got off of that, I'm happy to say.

NEXT ISSUE: Doug reveals more of his animation history, talks about his comic strip AMBLER, and reveals his final projects for screen, gallery, and T-shirts as we wrap up the last part of the Doug Wildey interview.

“I worked at the rodeo and took care of

MIKE PLOOG

Mike Ploog was perhaps the most distinctive artist to work on Marvel's mid-'70s monster line, and if you ever saw his work on GHOST RIDER, WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, FRANKENSTEIN, MAN-THING, PLANET OF THE APES, or KULL, you won't soon forget it. His distinctive Eisnerian style brought quite a bit of class to the books he worked on, and his work on the early WEIRDWORLD stories with Doug Moench is still admired today. (And we'll get into why you didn't see him on WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM, too.) Besides that, Mike has been an animator for Filmation, Hanna-Barbera, and Ralph Bakshi, and has worked on over 40 movies as an animator, storyboard artist, set designer, or whatever else he felt like doing. He did a lot of other stuff, too, and you'll find out all about it in the interview. So let's roll the tape . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *Mike, you were born in 1940 and got into comics and animation around 1969-70. So that leaves about 11 years as an adult before hand. What were you doing for a living before you became a comics person?*

MIKE PLOOG: I was in the Marine Corps for about ten years. *(Laughter.)* That's not really what you call a living.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mike Ploog

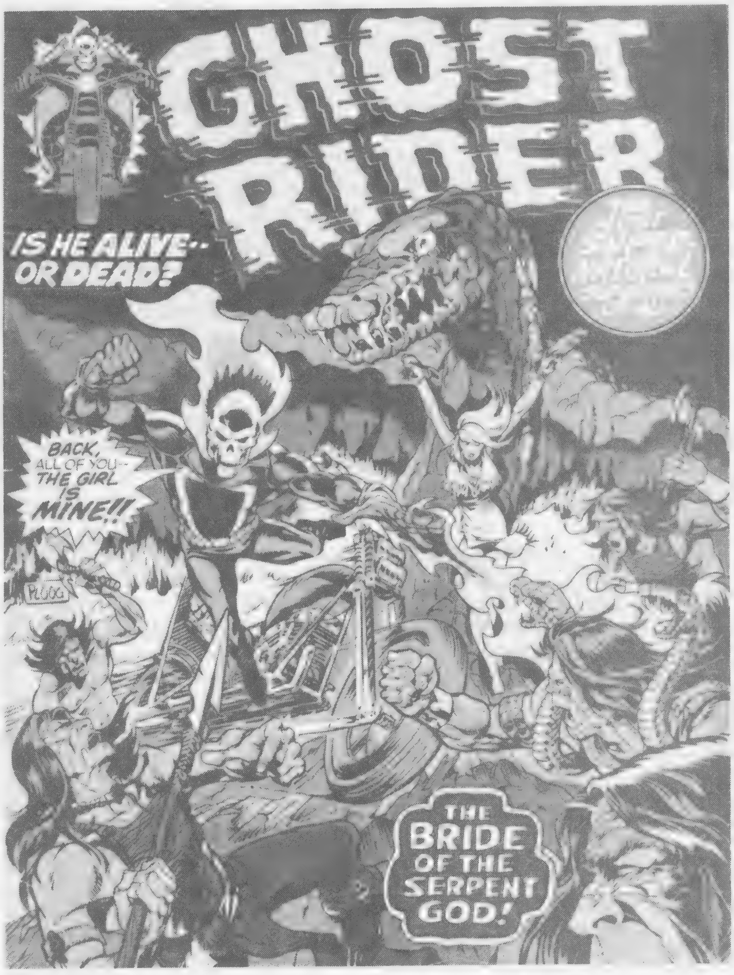
Born: 13 July 1940 — Mankato, Minnesota.

Family Configuration: Wife, Janet; daughters, Michelle and Diedre; son, George; stepson, Gerald.

Favorite Comic Book to Read: Simon and Kirby's BOY COMMANDOS. That, and **Jack Cole** books. I loved his stuff.

Favorite Boss: Frank Oz, on DARK CRYSTAL and LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS.

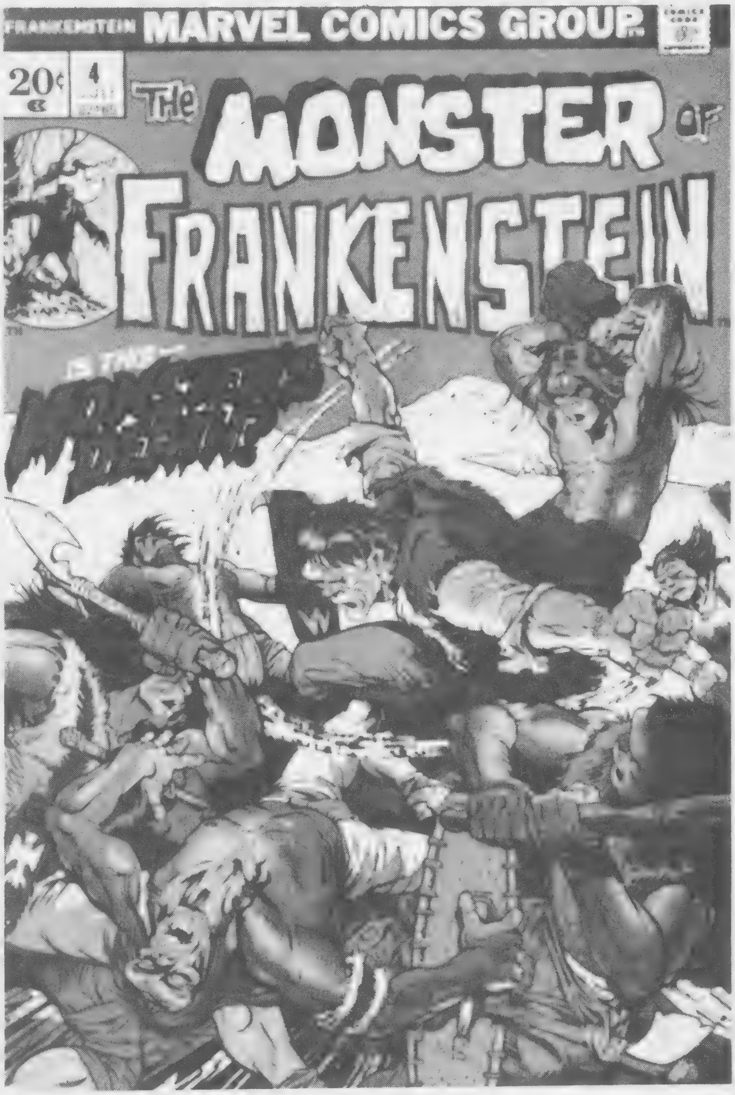
Pet Peeve about Comics: Publishers! *(Laughter.)*


GHOST RIDER
IS HE ALIVE-- OR DEAD?
BACK, ALL OF YOU-- THE GIRL IS MINE!!
PLOOG
THE BRIDE OF THE SERPENT GOD!

All artwork ©1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

the stock. I also rodeoed on the team.”

Here and far left: Two outstanding examples of Mike's horror work — the covers of MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #9 (Ghost Rider) and THE MONSTER OF FRANKENSTEIN #4. Both of these 1973 publications were written by Gary Friedrich, with Roy Thomas editing.



LOU: *It is being occupied!*

MIKE: Oh, God, I'll tell you, they keep you busier than hell.

LOU: *What did you do in the Marine Corps?*

MIKE: I did all kinds of goofy things. About three years of the ten, I was on the Marine Corps Rodeo Team in Camp Pendleton, California.

LOU: *Oh, yeah. I think Steranko told me that you'd been a rodeo rider or bronco buster.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Actually, I worked at the rodeo there and took care of the stock. I also rodeoed on the team. I rode bareback horses and Brahma bulls.

LOU: *You're a bull rider?*

MIKE: Oh, you better believe it!

LOU: *Jeez, what are some of your memorable experiences with the bulls?*

MIKE: *Every* experience is a memorable one with a Brahma bull!

LOU: *Maybe you try to forget those memorable experiences.* (Laughtet.)

MIKE: Oh, you don't forget 'em. You can talk to a cowboy, and he'll tell you about an eight-second ride, which is not very long when you think about it. But he'll talk to you about it for *hours*. I mean, it'll be like, "My God, he must have spent a week up there!"

LOU: *Time grows suddenly elastic when you're on top of one of those monsters, I'm sure.*

MIKE: I'll tell you, there were wonderful days there. I really enjoyed it. It was like living out a childhood fantasy.

LOU: *Well, I'm from Texas, and when Steranko told me that you'd been involved in bronco busting, I said, "Hey, I've got to learn about that!"*

MIKE: I'm taping the AMC tribute to Gene Autrey right now. I was raised on that stuff. I just love it. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *And you've never drawn a western strip?*

MIKE: No.

LOU: *That's a shame. That's an injustice!*

MIKE: Well, I've often thought about it. And I had a mountain man story that I wanted *real* bad to do. But it was just one of those goofy things, where everything interfered with it, and always a better offer came up, and I never got around to it. But one of these days I'm gonna do one. Just for nostalgic reasons.

LOU: *I think the field might be opening up to westerns now that we've had movies like TOMBSTONE making a hit.*

MIKE: Actually, that was kind of a comic-book production. The whole production had kind of a pulp feeling to it.

LOU: *Yeah, but it was a good pulp feeling.*

MIKE: Oh, it was wonderful. They really did very well with it.

LOU: *If they ever decide to do it for comics, I hope you put in your option for it.*

MIKE: Actually, I really go for the cornier stuff. I love good old corny western stuff.

LOU: *Old B-westerns, huh?*

MIKE: Yeah. I mean, heroes have gotta be bigger than life, villains have gotta be lower than the low, and you can't kiss the girl, you've just gotta ride off into the sunset at the end, and all that stuff. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *You can kiss the horse.*

MIKE: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah, you do a lot of kissing horses. You just gotta remember which end to kiss. *(LOTS of laughter.)* You always go to the pointy end.

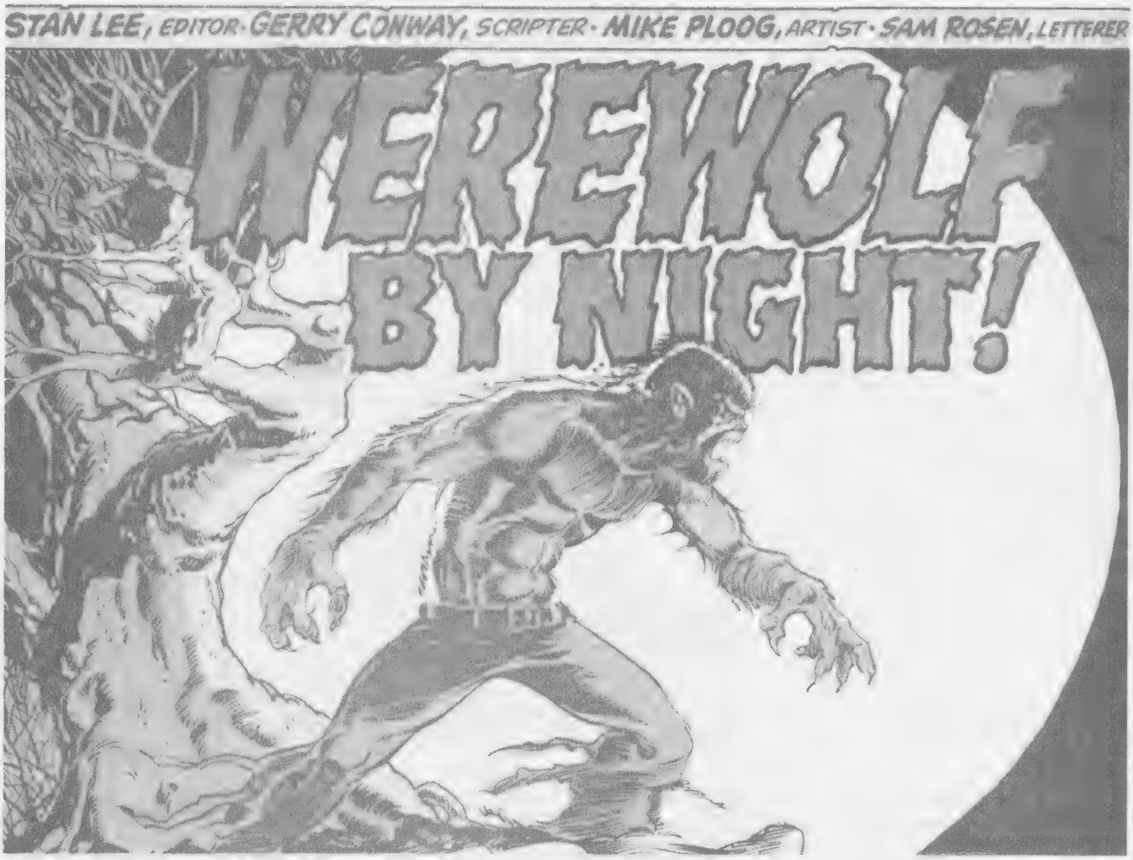
LOU: *The end that neighs.* (Laughter.) *Now, I'm going to ask the most overworked question of all. But that's because it's a good question. Which is, what got you interested in becoming a cartoonist?*

MIKE: I'll tell you, and this is total honesty — the lack of knowing how to do anything else.

LOU: *That's a good enough answer, and I think it's true for a lot of us in this*

"My first professional work was for Filmation, layouts

Here, a detail from the splash page of the second WEREWOLF BY NIGHT — with that issue's cover on our following page. All artwork by Ploog, pencils and inks.


STAN LEE, EDITOR · GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER · MIKE PLOOG, ARTIST · SAM ROSEN, LETTERER
WEREWOLF BY NIGHT!

business. (Laughter.)

MIKE: I got out of the Marine Corps, and I was driving a truck. I knew that I could draw, and other people encouraged me to do it. And I felt that, "Hey, I can do this." And I was always assuming *everybody* could do this, that it was a natural talent that came to everybody. I pursued it, and decided that it was a lot better than being poor. *(Laughter.)* Beat the *hell* out of being poor.

LOU: *Okay. Your first pro work, was it as an animator or a cartoonist?*

MIKE: My first professional work was actually working for Filmation. I was doing layouts and character design for Batman and Superman cartoons.

LOU: *The BATMAN-SUPERMAN HOUR, yeah, I remember that. Was that back in '69?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah.

LOU: *And about a year later, you ended up in the hands of Will Eisner at P.S. MAGAZINE. Tell me something about how you got that gig.*

MIKE: Well, it was very strange, because I was working at Hanna-Barbera at that time, doing a series called AUTO-CAT AND MOTORMOUSE. Boy, that was a thrill a minute, that one. And this young man that I was working with, who belonged to the National Cartoonists' Society, came up to me. The Society had put out this newsletter in which **Will Eisner** had advertised that he was looking for an assistant. To be absolutely frank, I had never *heard* of **Will Eisner.** And the young man said, "Well, you draw just like **Will Eisner.** And he wants a man with some military experience." So I thought, well, jeez, this fits me to a T. So I called him up, sent some artwork out to him. And he actually was in Los Angeles about two days later, so we met at one of the hotels in town. And he asked me if I could be at work by the following Monday. And that's actually how it worked out.

LOU: *So, was it fun working with him, learning from him?*

MIKE: Oh, I'll tell you, it was absolutely fantastic. I mean, he's really a very, very interesting man to work with. Because he's a *stingy* man. Stingy, meaning that he doesn't teach you anything. He makes you learn it. *(Laughter.)* And I learned an enormous amount from the man. I can never in a million years ever be able to add up exactly how much I owe him for all of that.

LOU: *But I can really see the Eisner influence in a lot of your things, particularly the splash pages.*

MIKE: The thing that he probably taught me the most was, one, to never draw something that you don't know. You never draw a face unless you know the guy whose face it is. Or you never draw a situation unless you can actually put yourself in it and do it. That was one of the things he always stressed, the faces of the characters in P.S. MAGAZINE, that they had to actually look like young soldiers. People that you would actually kind of recognize.

LOU: *And I suppose Connie Rodd looked like somebody you* hoped *you would recognize.*

and character design for Superman and Batman."

MIKE: I don't know who Connie Rodd looked like. *(Laughter.)* I think he had a crush on **Rita Hayworth** at one time, and I think that's where she came from.

LOU: *Yeah, Connie was an institution in P.S. from Will all the way through Murphy Anderson, and whoever did it after him. I suppose.*

MIKE: Yeah. And the other thing was, everything that Will drew, no matter how evil it might be or how treacherous it might seem, it always had a sense of humor to it. It always had a smirk.

LOU: *Yeah, you couldn't ever take it too seriously.*

MIKE: It wasn't meant to be taken too seriously.

LOU: *Or maybe the comic undertones made the horror more horrible. Well, around this time you started working for the three CARTOONS books . . . CARTOONS, DRAGTOONS and HOT ROD TOONS. Are you a car buff, or did you even have to be one to do those things?*

MIKE: Oh, no, I'm not a car buff. As a matter of fact, I hated drawing cars and motorcycles.

LOU: *And that's all they had! (Laughter.)*

MIKE: It was just a nice outlet. I was into the idea that I was a fairly good storyteller, and they were only two-pagers, but I got a chance to develop the character and try to tell a story.

LOU: *Which character was that?*

MIKE: Oh, there was never actually a continuing character. I remember one story in which there was this old guy who had this old, beat-up car. It was just this old geezer, and I just loved drawing old geezers. Everybody that saw it said, "Oh, God, jeezus, he's perfect!" *(Laughter.)* But little did they know that he was just about the only thing I *could* draw. It was just dumb luck that he happened at that time.

LOU: *I like that. Okay, any hope of a sidebar on your "Alfy Rader" strip for ESQUIRE?*

MIKE: Oh, jeez! Oh, that's funny! When I did that, I don't know whether I did it as a tribute to Will, or what. But it was kind of an **Eisnerish** story. And it was a black Spirit. Alfy was black, with a Spirit costume. And Will saw it, and he wrote and said that if I felt that I wanted to pursue this particular character, I'd better prepare myself for a lawsuit! *(Laughter.)* So, Will was ready to sue me over that. He didn't like it!

LOU: (Laughter.) *I suppose it would've made it an even better chance of a lawsuit if you'd called him "The Soul"!*

MIKE: Oh, yeah! *(Laughter.)* Will was always very, very protective. He was a very protective businessman.

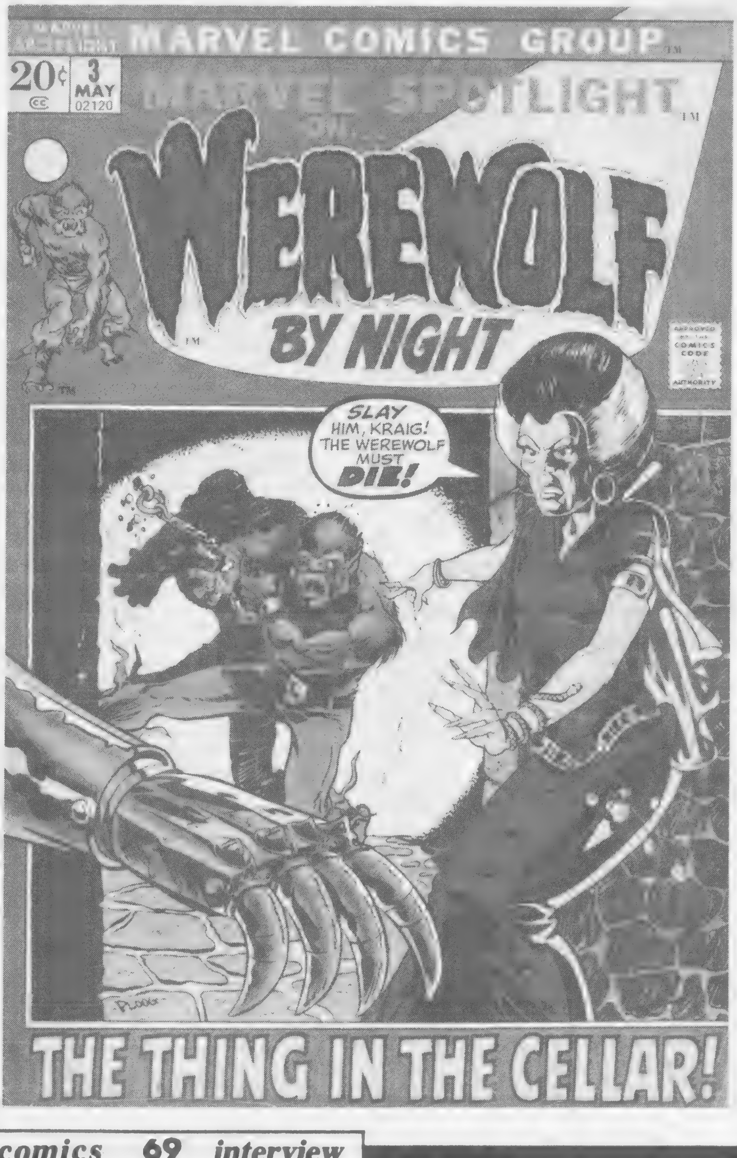
LOU: *Yeah, I imagine he had to be. Okay, in 1971, you moved on to Marvel Comics. Specifically, you moved on to the monster books, and KULL, and that well-done serial in PLANET OF THE APES, which is one of my favorites of your work. How did you start working for Marvel, and what was the first job you did for them?*

MIKE: Actually, it was Werewolf by Night in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #2, the first job I ever did for them.

LOU: *How did you start working for Marvel?*

MIKE: I'm not quite sure how it occurred. You know, what's funny, and we've mentioned it before, they asked me to do something, and I did a western. I wrote it myself, and everything. It's not been that long ago that I still had the pages to the damn thing. But they're long gone by now. I did about four or five pages of this, pencilled 'em up, and I took it in. And they said, "Naaowww, this isn't going to work, it's too cartoony." So I thought, "Well, I'll just pack this in, then." And I think I just went back and was doing something else at the time. But about two or three days later they called me up and asked me if I wanted to do some monster books. And I said, "Love it. Absolutely love it." So WEREWOLF BY NIGHT was born, and away we went.

LOU: *I'm looking through the first few pages of the first WEREWOLF BY NIGHT story, and it's quite impressive*


MARVEL SPOTLIGHT
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
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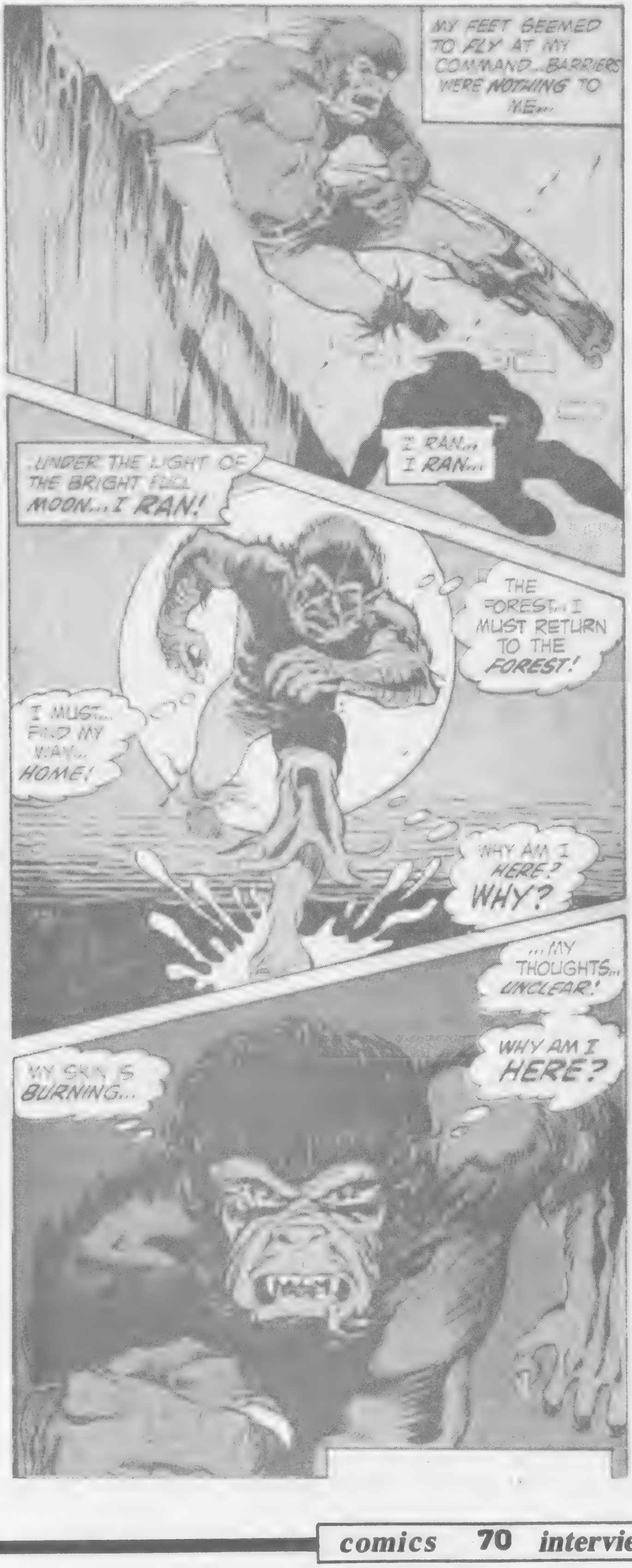
MARVEL SPOTLIGHT ON
WEREWOLF BY NIGHT
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
SLAY HIM, KRAIG! THE WEREWOLF MUST DIE!
PLOOG
THE THING IN THE CELLAR!

"I regretted leaving FRANKENSTEIN. But Marvel


MY FEET SEEMED TO FLY AT MY COMMAND...BARRIERS WERE NOTHING TO ME...
I RAN... I RAN...
...UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE BRIGHT FULL MOON...I RAN!
THE FOREST... I MUST RETURN TO THE FOREST!
I MUST... FIND MY WAY... HOME!
WHY AM I HERE? WHY?
...MY THOUGHTS... UNCLEAR!
MY SKIN IS BURNING...
WHY AM I HERE?

with these Eisnerish figures and the dripping-wet backgrounds with all the rain — you expect to see a SPIRIT sign back there or something. And one thing that does get me — and you'll never believe this — is the sequence on page three where you have a three-panel bit of the Werewolf running towards you. It almost looks like one of the opening sequences of THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN. (Laughter.) *Like that bit was choreographed from these panels. He's coming at you face-on, like he was running in slow motion with a fist in the forefront, his other arm back, and his face looking at you. And if Steve Austin was big and hairy, maybe that'd be him!* (Laughter.) *I don't know. But this is a pretty effective thing. As a matter of fact, WEREWOLF BY NIGHT was the first Marvel monster strip of the '70s, right?*

MIKE: Right. It was the beginning of it all.

LOU: *So how was it, getting into that?*

MIKE: Well, I loved it, because I was a big monster movie freak. I loved the old Saturday matinee stuff, the serials and all that stuff. But I was absolutely crazy about the old black-and-white monster movies. And the more melodramatic they were, the more I liked them. The cornier they were, the more I loved them. And I always looked at comic books much like a silent movie. The more melodrama that I could stick in there, the more I liked it. To me, that's what monsters were really all about, like soap operas.

LOU: *Maybe like DARK SHADOWS.*

MIKE: It was melodrama at its finest in the old monster movies. Nowadays, they just want gore. The old ones were really high-camp melodrama, and I loved it.

LOU: *Yeah, horror movies you can enjoy.*

MIKE: Yeah! It was good theater.

LOU: *One of the things that impressed me from those days was your early FRANKENSTEIN, the adaptation of the Mary Shelley novel you did with Gary Friedrich.*

MIKE: Oh, I loved that story. I really did. I regretted leaving MONSTER OF FRANKENSTEIN. But the reason I left it was because Marvel wanted me to update him. They wanted me to bring the Monster into the 20th century and have him battling the Hulk and all that. And I couldn't do it. I wasn't really — I didn't see him like that. I saw my Monster as this big, sympathetic kind of beast. And He couldn't be taken into the 20th century like that, so I left the book.

LOU: *They didn't have him battling the Hulk, but they did have him battling a lot*

wanted me to update him, and I couldn't do it."

of other fruitcakes along that time.

MIKE: It actually destroyed the character. Because the Frankenstein Monster is my favorite monster. He's this wonderful, naive, almost childlike character who's in this monster body.

LOU: *The Boris Karloff kind of deal.*

MIKE: And every day, he's learning something about mankind. And it's his naiveness that gets him into all these problems. And I loved that.

LOU: *Like the scene in the 1931 movie where he throws the little girl into the pond, and can't understand why she doesn't float, like the flowers.*

MIKE: Yeah, exactly. The little girl throws a stick in, and it floats. And then he thinks that's great fun, so he throws the little girl in. And it seems logical to that kind of mind. It's almost like the mind of a backward child. They do things out of this strange innocence. And they can do some very, very destructive things out of this innocence.

LOU: *Right, not knowing that it's destructive.*

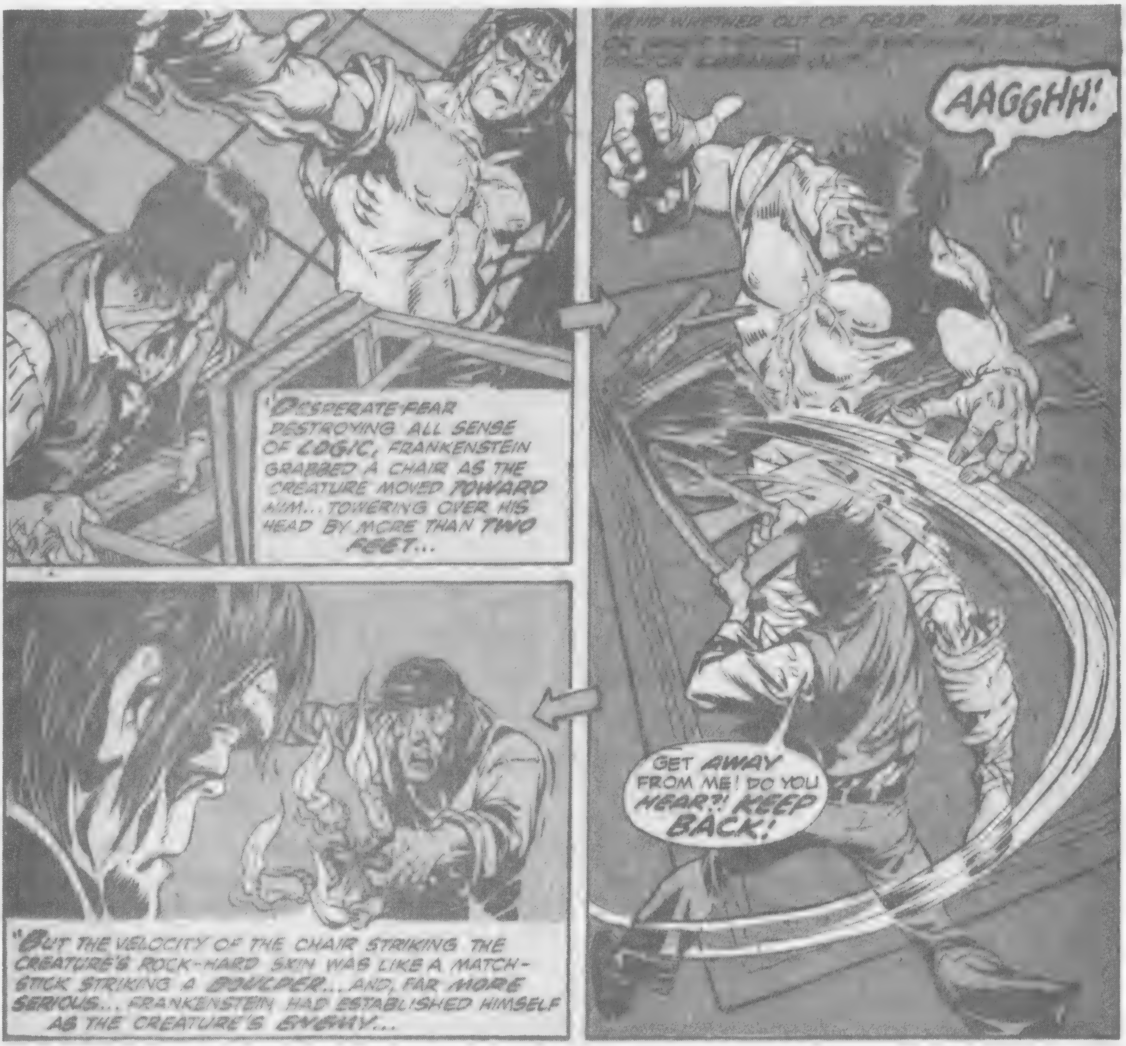
MIKE: Not knowing their power, or what might be the repercussions of their actions.

LOU: *Right, exactly. one of the things everybody's going to want to hear, because the character's come back as a much more popular form, is Ghost Rider. And you were the first artist on the '70s cycle-riding Ghost Rider, and co-created him with Gary Friedrich. So tell me something about your Ghost Rider.*

MIKE: Well, at this time I was unhappy with what was going on with FRANKENSTEIN, so they wanted to come up with something to keep me busy. And GHOST RIDER had been a western. So they asked me if I could come up with something that would be a motorcycle hero. Oddly enough, I carried a bit of the western over into him, because of his costume, the paneled shirt and everything.

LOU: *Kind of like the Rawhide Kid, or something.*

MIKE: Yeah, exactly. I put him on a


"AND WHETHER OUT OF FEAR... HATRED...
AAGGHH!
DESPERATE FEAR DESTROYING ALL SENSE OF LOGIC, FRANKENSTEIN GRABBED A CHAIR AS THE CREATURE MOVED TOWARD HIM... TOWERING OVER HIS HEAD BY MORE THAN TWO FEET...
GET AWAY FROM ME! DO YOU HEAR?! KEEP BACK!
"BUT THE VELOCITY OF THE CHAIR STRIKING THE CREATURE'S ROCK-HARD SKIN WAS LIKE A MATCH-STICK STRIKING A BOULDER... AND, FAR MORE SERIOUS... FRANKENSTEIN HAD ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS THE CREATURE'S ENEMY...

Previous page: Well, Lou's talkin' about it — here's the panels! Mike's story art was covered by, of all people, a Neal Adams cover!! This is both Ploog's first work for Marvel and WEREWOLF BY NIGHT's first appearance. Above: Three awesome panels from Mike's FRANKENSTEIN (January, 1973).

“I got this horrendous letter that looked like it was

chopper, and went out and bought a book on witchcraft symbols, and away we went.

LOU: *Oh! Did you use those for the sequence where he's doing magic, or what?*

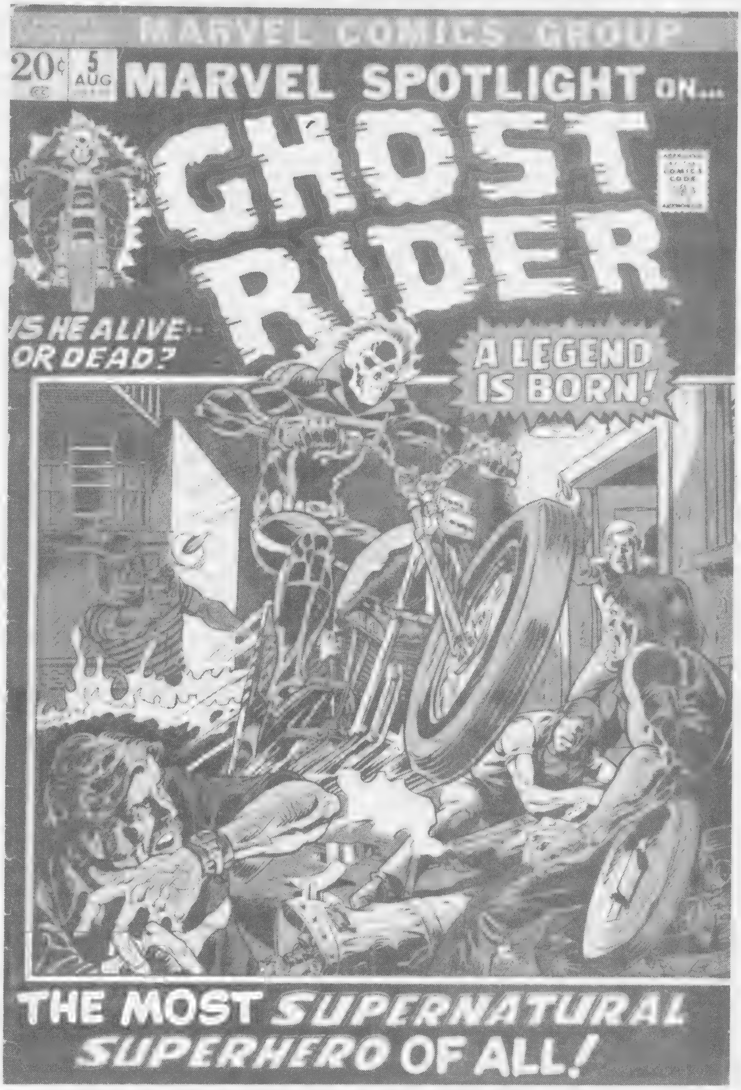
MIKE: Yeah. I did do a little bit of reading on the occult, just to try to get a handle on what the character should be doing, because he'd sold his soul to the Devil. So I didn't do a great deal of research on it. I tried not to even get into that part of it. I had enough problems with it — once, I was even invited to a witches' coven.

LOU: *Ohhhh!*

MIKE: I'd gotten quite a few goofy letters on that series. I was invited to a witches' coven, and just filed that away with all the other goofy letters I'd get. And about six months later, I got this horrendous letter that looked like it was written in brown ink or blood or something! *(Laughter.)* And they said they were really disappointed that I wasn't there, because I was going to be the guest of honor and all this stuff. And there were all these weird curses and weird symbols and bloody handprints and all. *(Laughter.)* I tell you, it scared the livin' hell out of me! I slept with the lights on for about six months. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *And, hopefully, with a cross around your neck.*

The Ploog cover from Ghost Rider's first appearance: MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #5 (August, 1972). The series was conceived by Gary Friedrich. Editing: Roy Thomas.



MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Woooo! I want to tell you, that was a little too heavy for me. I didn't know I was getting into that kind of stuff.

LOU: *I'm looking at the first Ghost Rider story as we speak (MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #5), and I've gotten to this one, you should excuse me for saying it,* hellaciously *effective sequence where most of the page is silent. You've got Crash Simpson, the stunt driver, jumping over the long panel at the top where everybody's looking at him in silence, kind of like an old Spirit story. And he manages to make it over most of the line of cars, but comes down and hits the last three. Then Johnny Blaze runs up and sees his body, and all that. But that's an incredibly effective graphic sequence.*

MIKE: I think that goes back to my love of film. I really wanted it to look like a piece of film, and work like a piece of film. And you can only do that in certain portions of a story. If you do it too much or don't do it enough, it doesn't work. I've always liked putting that kind of thing into a book.

LOU: *Yeah, you have to know where to put it and where not to put it.*

MIKE: If it feels right within a story, then you do it. If it doesn't feel right, then it just doesn't happen. The story's the most important thing.

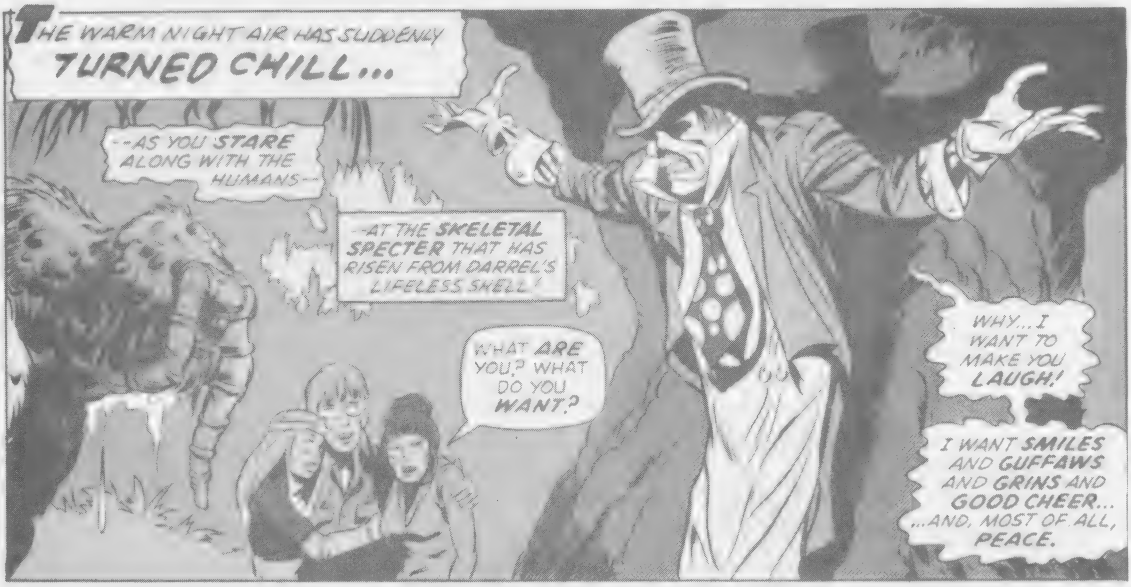
LOU: *What was it like doing that crossover thing where Dracula meets the Werewolf (WEREWOLF BY NIGHT #15)?*

MIKE: That was great fun, because I enjoyed the Dracula character. That was like a natural thing to do, actually. You can't work in a world with werewolves without someplace having Dracula running around. So it seemed like the obvious thing to do.

LOU: *And one of the things I'm sure everybody will remember about your monster tour was MAN-THING. I think you did some of the most effective Man-Thing art around. One of my favorites was the clown story, MAN-THING #5 and #6.*

MIKE: Oh, everyone loved the clown story! Actually, I wasn't the first artist to do MAN-THING. **Gray Morrow** did a black-and-white story first, in SAVAGE TALES #1. But I really enjoyed doing the Man-Thing, because I was working with **Steve Gerber** at the time. And Steve allowed me to do a lot of the plotting. I would actually sit down and plot the whole thing myself. And often I would plot it and then send in the pages to Steve, and Steve would call me and ask me what the story was about. *(Laughter.)* And I

written in blood. I slept with the lights on.”


THE WARM NIGHT AIR HAS SUDDENLY TURNED CHILL...
--AS YOU STARE ALONG WITH THE HUMANS--
--AT THE SKELETAL SPECTER THAT HAS RISEN FROM DARREL'S LIFELESS SHELL!
WHAT ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WHY... I WANT TO MAKE YOU LAUGH!
I WANT SMILES AND GUFFAWS AND GRINS AND GOOD CHEER... ...AND, MOST OF ALL, PEACE.

The 77th panel (of a 78-panel story) of MAN-THING #5 (May, 1974), with Steve Gerber's most loved guest star (outside of Howard the Duck) . . . “The Clown.” Pencilled by Mike and inked by Frank Chiaramonte.

really enjoyed it, I really did. Because the Man-Thing was a great sort of Frankenstein-like character, because he was a big, sympathetic character. He was a Frankenstein character.

LOU: *Well, was the clown bit yours or Steve's?*

MIKE: That was an idea that Steve came up with. What it was, was that it developed enormously through the fact that Steve wanted to do flashbacks, and I hate flashbacks. I think they're the most boring thing there is in the world. One of the things that I came up with that I really still to this day like the hell out of is that I had a flashback, and it's actually happening in the swamp in the form of a play, and they're all walking through the water while it's happening. And that still works for me today. I can't remember whether it was Steve's idea or my idea. It doesn't matter. The point is, it really worked.

LOU: *One of the images that always stuck with me from that story is the bit where, to get information, the guy reaches out, puts his hand like a ghost through another guys' forehead and pulls out a scroll from his head, magically.*

MIKE: Well, did you notice that we used the same thing in THE THING? *(Laughter.)* The guy slipped his hand up underneath the guy's face. Those things stick with you. *(Laughter.)* You drag them from one medium to the other.

LOU: *Of course, you did GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING #1, with the Glob.*

MIKE: Oh, yeah, with **Nixon!** *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Nixon, right!*

MIKE: I cannot remember why we put **Nixon** there, as the head Entropist. I think it was because Watergate was going on at the time. It just *had* to be **Nixon.** Actually, the story itself is not that strong. It's not one of the best Man-Thing stories we ever told. But the **Nixon** character really stood out, and I got a lot of letters about that. Everybody liked the idea of the **Mad Nixon.**

LOU: *You also had a pretty nice stint on KULL THE DESTROYER. The first cover on your run (#11) I'm looking at right now, and it's pretty impressive. It's “By This Axe I Rule!” with Kull in the center, holding a sword in one hand and an axe in the other, with a girl on his arm and all the deaders or soon-to-be-deaders around. So how did you get into the Kull thing?*

MIKE: Well, to be honest, I think they just offered it to me, and I said I'd like to do it. Because I was always a big **Frazetta** fan — I mean, who wasn't? And I often kinda fancied myself becoming someone as brilliant as **Mr. Frazetta.** Haven't managed it yet, but I'm working on it. *(Laughter.)* I really enjoyed doing KULL, because I love sword-and-sorcery and I love fantasy. It was good fun. If you look at the first story, there's a bit of Robin Hood in it, **Errol Flynn,** with everybody standing around in their long cloaks, dripping wet.

LOU: *There's one character in that issue, which I'm looking through right now, who's a dead ringer for Vincent Price.*

MIKE: I used to do that kind of stuff a lot. I used to do **Peter Lorre, Vincent Price, Lon Chaney,** whoever, because I was such a fan of those people. They continuously appeared in the books.

LOU: *Well, one of my favorite series of yours was “Terror on the Planet of the Apes,” in a black-and-white Marvel magazine whose title escapes me at the moment.* (Laughter.) *I always liked that one, with Jason, Alexander, and Gunpowder Julius.*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. I was working with **Doug Moench** on that, and Doug and I were running out of material. You can only do so much on the PLANET OF THE APES stuff before you have to get totally away from the original story. The mountain man story — I've always been a mountain man freak. At that time, I was trying to put together a syndicated comic strip called “Legends and Lies.” It was about great legends like Pecos Bill and **Davy Crockett,** but really doing goofy fantasy stuff, legends and lies. We were talking about mountain men, and Doug had a lot of material on them, and sent me a lot of stuff on mountain men. Actually, I lost one of his books, and I don't think he'll ever forgive me for it. Every time I

"Marvel was going to do great things with it."

talk to him, he mentions that damn book. *(Laughter.)* But he said, "Let's do a mountain man one," and that's how that mountain man ape character, Gunpowder Julius, came about.

LOU: *He's one character I do remember. Gunpowder Julius, smoking that pipe and trading punches with that other guy, bashing each other just in a friendly fashion.*

MIKE: It really came right from the "Legends and Lies" strip that I was doing, because it was like **Big Mike Fink** —

LOU: *Oh, the rafter! Yeah!*

MIKE: — and **Davy Crockett**.

LOU: *Yeah, they'd bang each other around like Robin Hood and Little John, to see which one is the toughest dude. That was neat. Now, we've worked our way up to what is one of your most famed strips, which is the early WEIRDWORLD. I liked your work on that one quite a bit, so can you tell us something about its genesis back in MARVEL SUPER ACTION #1 and MARVEL PREMIERE #38?*

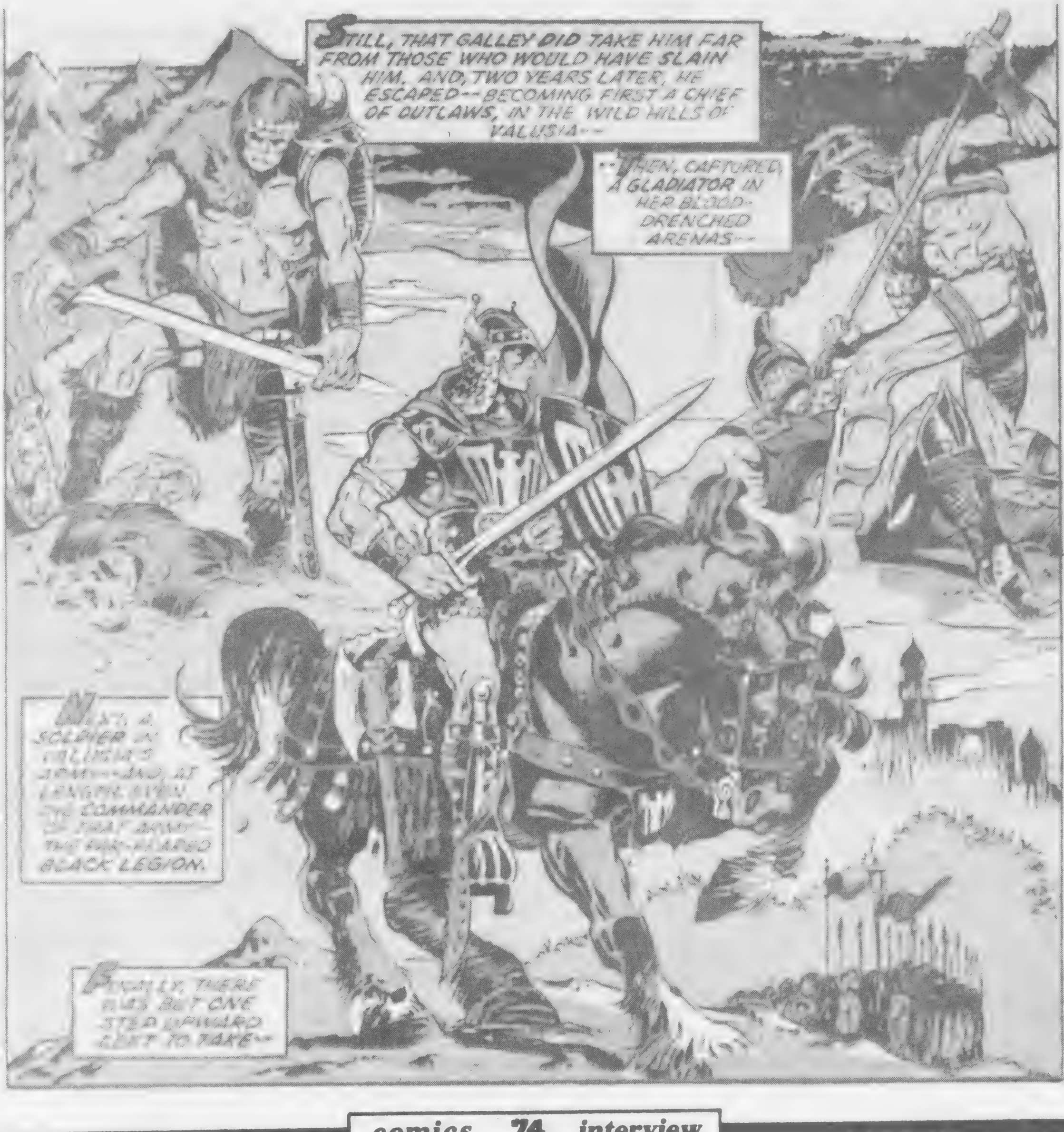
MIKE: Well, **Doug Moench** came up with the idea of doing this thing. And I loved it, because I had never done anything for comics like it before, and it was a style which I worked very naturally in. At that time, it was more or less a natural style for me, that kind of cartoony style. I did it up, and Marvel bought it from us and sat on it for almost a year. Didn't publish it. And then one day, they published it in the back of a Punisher book!

LOU: *Yeah, MARVEL SUPER ACTION.*

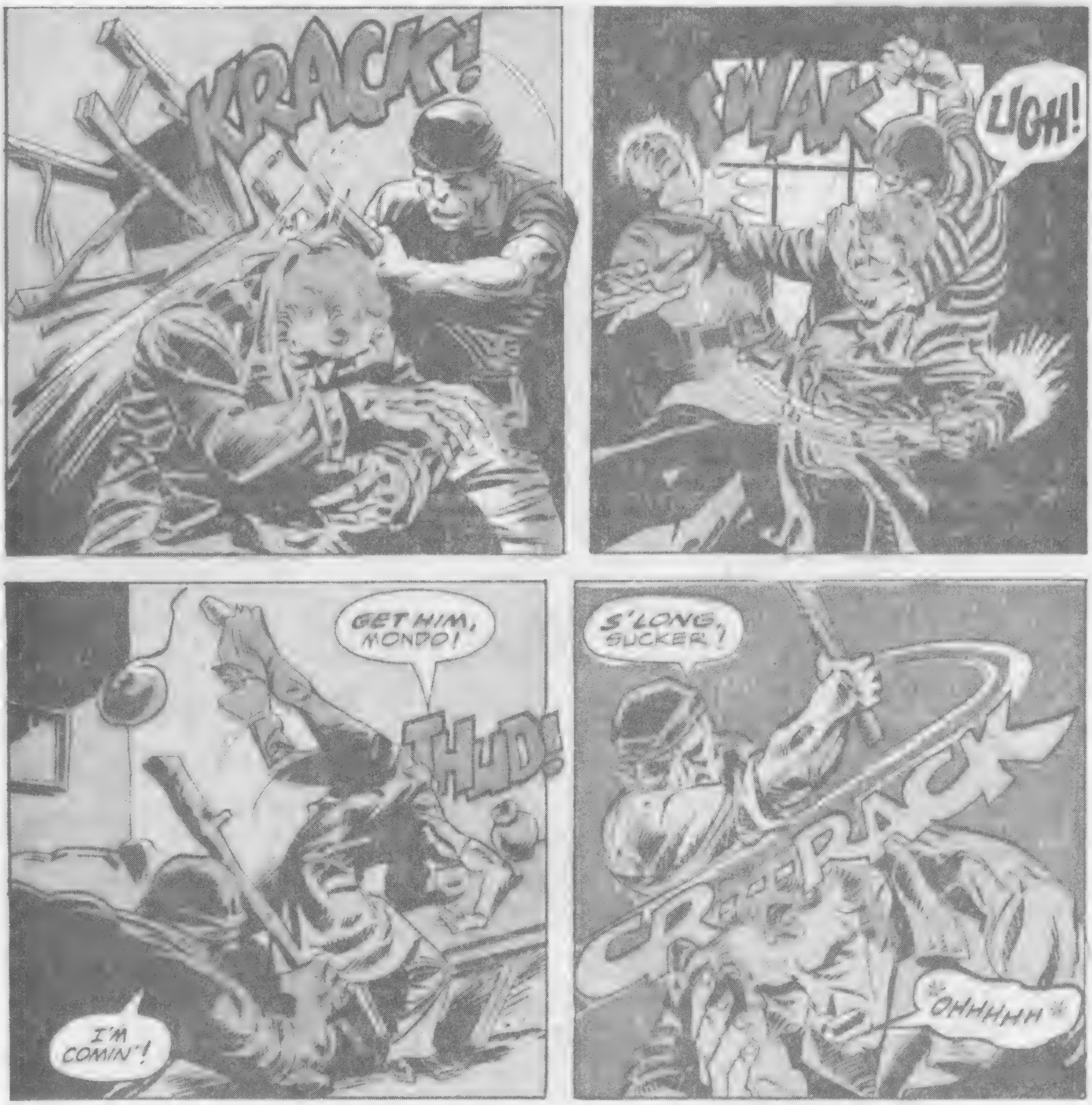
MIKE: And people loved it! And next thing you know, we were off and running with it. Marvel was going to do all kinds of great things with it. Actually, we were going to do something like a hand-painted 60-page story with the characters.

LOU: *Right. That was WARRIORS OF*

KULL THE DESTROYER.


STILL, THAT GALLEY DID TAKE HIM FAR FROM THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE SLAIN HIM. AND, TWO YEARS LATER, HE ESCAPED--BECOMING FIRST A CHIEF OF OUTLAWS, IN THE WILD HILLS OF VALUSIA--
--THEN, CAPTURED, A GLADIATOR IN HER BLOOD-DRENCHED ARENAS--
NEXT, A SOLDIER IN VALUSIA'S ARMY--AND, AT LENGTH, EVEN THE COMMANDER OF THAT ARMY--THE FAR-FEARED BLACK LEGION.
FINALLY, THERE WAS BUT ONE STEP UPWARD LEFT TO TAKE--

“I never had a book get cancelled on me.”


KRACK!
SWAK
UGH!
GET HIM, MONDO!
THUD!
I'M COMIN'!
S'LONG, SUCKER!
CRRRACK
OHHHHH

Luke Malone ©1975 Atlas Comics/Mike Ploog.

Ploog as writer and penciller (with inks by Frank Springer) for Atlas Comics' POLICE ACTION #1 (February, 1973) with Luke Malone, Manhunter.

THE SHADOW REALM.

MIKE: What happened was that the whole thing fell apart. I started it, and we broke it down, and I laid it out and everything. Then they decided they were going to cut it back to 40 pages, and the story wouldn't work anymore. On and on, until I told them to forget it, I just didn't want to do it anymore. Then everybody was angry with me, and calling me names. I don't want to mention anybody's name here. Actually, that was kind of the end of my run with Marvel there. It really did push me out of shape, because Doug and I had put a lot of work into that thing.

LOU: *And it showed. In fact, Cat Yronwode once told me in a conversation that it looked as though a small bit of John Buscema's work on that story (MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL #11-#13) might have either been influenced by or swiped a little bit from the originals you did on the stories.*

MIKE: Which one was that?

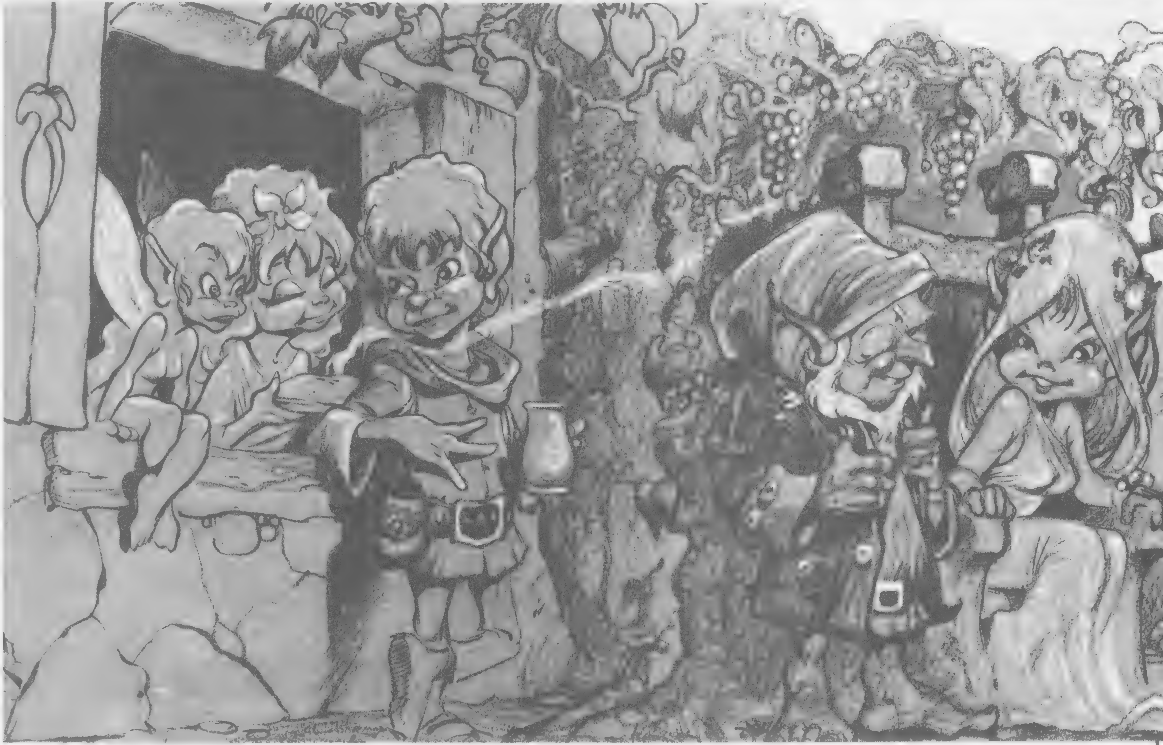
LOU: *WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM.*

MIKE: Well, at the time I had been doing work for **Ralph Bakshi** on LORD OF THE RINGS, and there's some LORD OF THE RINGS stuff in there, no doubt about it. Some of the demon characters are definitely Ringwraiths.

LOU: *So that was the end of your Marvel tenure. But they'd downsized somewhat in 1976 and cancelled all the monster books.*

MIKE: Yeah, they were slowly cancelling them. Actually, I left most of them before they got cancelled. I never had a book get cancelled on me. I always ended up leaving them because they started messing with the characters. And as soon as they messed with them, the sales went down. If they had just left them alone, I think it would have been all right.

“If anybody has my Artful Dodger story, raise your hand.”



One example of Mike's animation film work — here, for Ralph Bakshi's WIZARDS (1976).

WIZARDS ©1976 Ralph Bakshi Productions, Inc.

LOU: *But everybody has to put in a new change or something.*

MIKE: Yeah, yeah.

LOU: *One thing that you did for somebody other than Marvel in the mid-'70s was that short-lived "Luke Malone, Manhunter" strip in POLICE ACTION.*

MIKE: Oh, yes. I did a couple of stories for Atlas Comics. I also did a couple of others which never got printed. And I'd like to find out where one of those stories of mine is, because it's kind of an Artful Dodger story about a street kid, and it never got published. I often wonder what happened to it. If anybody's got my Artful Dodger story, please raise their hand!

LOU: *If anybody's got Mike's story, please send it in to COMICS INTERVIEW and we'll give it to him!* (Laughter.) *Now we've worked our way through the comics, and we're about to get into something I was interested in, which is your work in movies. Earlier on, before I started researching you for this interview, the only thing I'd known you did in movies was some animation for WIZARDS. But then I checked your credits and found that you'd done storyboards or set design for the middle two SUPERMAN movies, for SUPERGIRL, for GOOD MORNING VIETNAM — and you've gotta tell us about that one! — and MELVIN AND HOWARD, and animated or semi-animated stuff like LORD OF THE RINGS, HEAVY METAL, and DARK CRYSTAL — and I was very impressed.*

MIKE: I wrote 'em all up for some reason recently and sent them in to somebody. Altogether, I've worked on almost 40 films.

LOU: *Was that storyboarding?*

MIKE: It kinda covered the gamut. I was an assistant director on LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, I was a production designer on **Michael Jackson's** MOONWALKER. I had a good run in movies.

LOU: *Was WIZARDS the first time you got to work in movies?*

MIKE: Actually, no. The first film I worked on was called WINDS OF CHANGE, or METAMORPHOSES. I worked on it as a storyboard man and layout artist. That was for a Japanese company whose name I can't recall.

LOU: *How did you fall into working with Ralph Bakshi?*

MIKE: He called me up and said, "Hey, **Ploog!**"

LOU: (Laughter.) *Like he knew you, right?*

MIKE: Well, if you know **Bakshi,** you know exactly what I mean! "Hey, **Ploog,** get over here, I want to talk to you!" *(Laughter.)* And I think those were his exact words.

LOU: (Laughter.) *And that was his subtle approach, right?*

MIKE: And that was on a good day! *(Laughter.)* I had a good relationship with Ralph. I still do, actually. And I may be the only person in the world that does.

LOU: *Well, let's not break a winner here.*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* No, I tell you, I like old Ralph. He's got a horrendous reputation, horrendous. And well-deserved, mind you! He worked really hard at it. But I got on well with him, and I liked him. He's a very, very talented man. And it's unharnessed talent. It's very strange working with a man who cannot harness his talent to just do one thing. He's got to do forty million things, all at the same time.

LOU: *And hope they all get done.*

MIKE: And that's why his films look the way they do. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *WIZARDS, LORD OF THE RINGS, and HEAVY METAL, all of that was with Bakshi, right?*

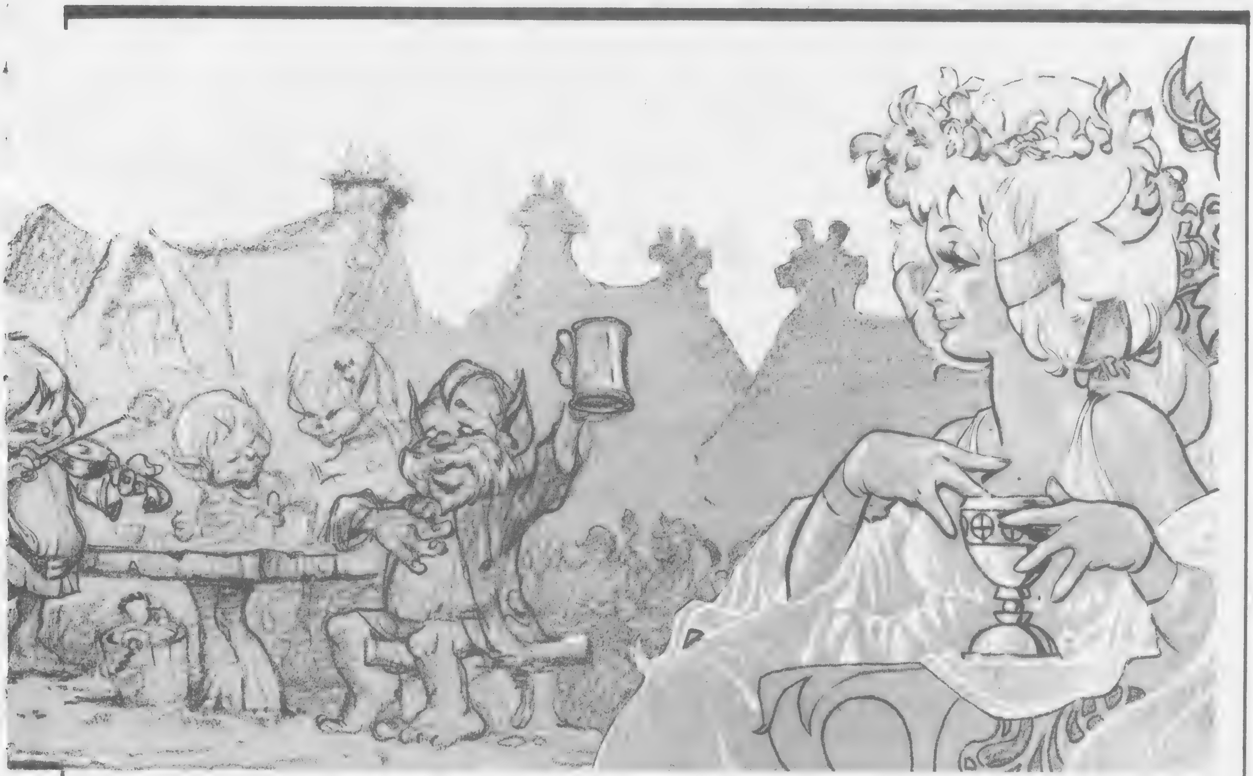
MIKE: Right.

LOU: *Who was DARK CRYSTAL for?*

MIKE: That was **Jim Henson.**

LOU: *Oh, the Muppet guy. Right. Okay, I want to ask you something about the*

"If you know Bakshi, you know what I mean."



SUPERMAN and SUPERGIRL movies. What was your involvement?

MIKE: I was working over at Universal Studios on MELVIN AND HOWARD. I forget who it was in the art department who got a call to go to England to work on SUPERMAN. I was there, and he said, "No, I can't go to England. I've got a wife and kids and all this stuff." And I just said, "I'll go to England." So off I went. And I never looked back. I lived in England for about ten years.

LOU: *My lord. So you must have gotten back here just recently, right?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah, about four years ago.

LOU: *Glad you're back. You were storyboarding on those?*

MIKE: Yeah. And actually, on SUPERMAN III, I wrote the opening sequence, that goofy thing which has no writing to it because it's just a slapstick kind of **Rube Goldberg** thing.

LOU: *Are you talking about the bit where Clark Kent is stumbling into fire hydrants and knocking them over and stuff?*

MIKE: Yeah, and the little penguins are waddling all over the street. *(Laughter.)* I struck up a good relationship with the director on that thing, **Richard Lester.** Oddly enough, I don't know if Richard knew it, but he taught me a hell of a lot. He was a very, very strange director. I mean, he never went to his dailies. And he was a big fan of **Buster Keaton,** and he would try to shoot everything as flat-on as possible. And he left it up to me to come up with all of their weirdo comic-book stuff. And I really, really enjoyed working with him, because we storyboarded those things to death. I mean, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of storyboards on those things.

LOU: *Did you design the superhero fight in SUPERMAN II?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. The whole fight was mine.

LOU: *How did it look, seeing it up there on the screen after you'd designed it?*

MIKE: Oh, I tell you, it looked fantastic. Because it was right off the storyboards. It's always a thrill when you see something like that. And working with those guys over there in England, they are so professional and so competent that you knew they could pull across the gag. If we had a storyboard meeting and I showed 'em a sequence, and they said, "Love it! We can do that!" — you knew you'd see it in the screen, just as it was boarded.

LOU: *Okay, naturally I wanted to ask you about GOOOOOD MORNING VIETNAM!* (Laughter.) *And I had to say it like that!*

MIKE: That was with my other favorite director, **Barry Levinson.** The first time I met Barry was on YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES.

LOU: *Oh, you were on YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES!*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. And Barry had never worked with a storyboard artist before. So this was a brand-new experience for him, and he thought it was the greatest thing that had ever happened. He actually could sit down and edit the movie on storyboards. So he and I got to be very good friends, and we still are. He's a hell of a director, and I really enjoyed working with Barry.

LOU: *I didn't know you were on YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES. So, what was it like working with Spielberg on that one?*

MIKE: Well, actually, I saw **Spielberg** once. *(Laughter.)* He walked in the office because he wanted to check out one of the sequences, and I pitched a sequence to him. As he was turning to walk out of the office, he turned and said, "You're an American, aren't you?" *(Laughter.)* His powers of observation absolutely boggled me! *(Laughter and more laughter.)*

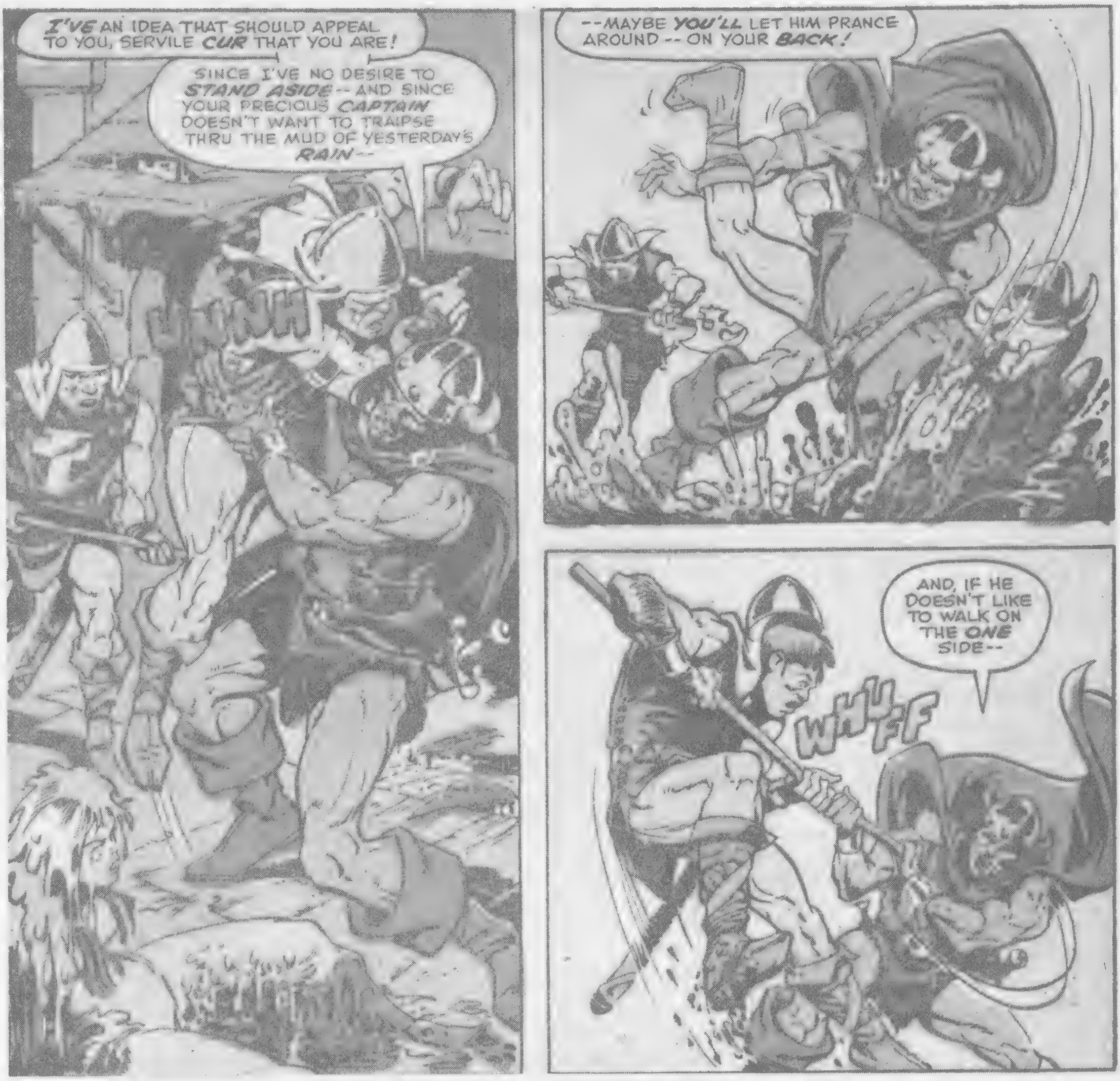
LOU: *Which sequence was that, by the way?*

MIKE: It was the pyramid sequence. Everybody hated that sequence, and we were trying to find a way to make it not look like THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK or something. Because it was starting to look like INDIANA JONES, and everybody hated it. But **Spielberg**

"I'm doing a card game much like MAGIC."

Move over, Barry Windsor-Smith *and* Big John Buscema! Rarely-mentioned one-shot job Mike did on CONAN #57 (December, 1975). This is Ploog's second job involving Roy Thomas and Robert E. Howard; the first was on KULL THE DESTROYER.

Conan © Robert E. Howard Estate.


I'VE AN IDEA THAT SHOULD APPEAL TO YOU, SERVILE CUR THAT YOU ARE!
SINCE I'VE NO DESIRE TO STAND ASIDE -- AND SINCE YOUR PRECIOUS CAPTAIN DOESN'T WANT TO TRAIPSE THRU THE MUD OF YESTERDAY'S RAIN --
UUNH
-- MAYBE YOU'LL LET HIM PRANCE AROUND -- ON YOUR BACK!
AND, IF HE DOESN'T LIKE TO WALK ON THE ONE SIDE --
WHUFF

hung onto it, because he liked it. He was the *only* one who liked it. And I kept changing it, and finally, in the end, it ended up just the way he wanted it originally. So it was a lot of work for nothing.

LOU: *At least you got paid for it.*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. I got paid very well for it.

LOU: *So what's your latest project? Is it a movie, or what?*

MIKE: No, I'm doing a card game much like MAGIC. I'm working with **Keith Parkinson** on that one. Keith wrote the game, which is called GUARDIANS, and it's a fantastic game. I'm designing all of the characters, some 300 different ones, and doing the paintings. So I'm up to my armpits in paint.

LOU: *Which outfit is this gonna be coming out from?*

MIKE: This is Friedlander.

LOU: *When is it supposed to be out in the stores?*

MIKE: I believe spring of next year.

LOU: *We'll be looking forward to it. Are you going to do some more movie work?*

MIKE: Well, I've been shying away from the movies. The bad thing about movies is that you're an artist, definitely, but your art is disposable. Actually, what they want is your mind, your visual interpretation of things. And if you could just talk it through, they would pay you for that. But you have to put it in pictures, so that everybody can look at it. But it's all disposable artwork.

LOU: *To them.*

MIKE: Well, it's disposable, and also, you do very quick sketches. Because one of the things about storyboards is that you can't really do finished artwork. Because the director looks at it, and if he thinks it's a beautiful picture, he won't throw it out. It doesn't work. He'll sit there and say, "Ah, god, I love that drawing!" He'll hang onto that thing and hang onto it, and you know, deep down, that the damn thing

“I’m a bit of a bull in a china shop. *(Laughter.)*”

doesn’t work with the story. And so, what you do is find a style to work in that is not dear, that the directors are not going to be inhibited by.

LOU: *Kind of minimalist?*

MIKE: Yeah. Kind of keeping it down to just atmospherics, and figures that are kind of nondescript.

LOU: *Which kind of makes me realize why Alex Toth was such a good guy for this kind of stuff.*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, exactly! But, after ten to fifteen years of working for the movies, I just wanted to do finished art again. I wanted to do it so desperately.

LOU: *Also, it’ll be getting out to an audience in that form.*

MIKE: Yeah. And I miss that. I miss it a lot. I’ve always been an artist who, when you do something, you have it in your mind that a lot of people are going to see it. You do something different, you do something a little special. Because you’re not doing it any longer just for yourself, you’re doing it for some kind of mass, faceless audience out there. That really kicks you into a different gear, and there’s a big thrill to it, there really is. And I miss that.

LOU: *Do you think you’ll be getting back into comics at any time soon?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. I just finished a book with **Steve Gerber** again.

LOU: *Was that like old home week?*

MIKE: Well, I think I insulted poor Steve, because they asked me for a quote they were going to publish someplace. And I wrote something silly and stupid, like, “It’s great to be back in the sewers again!” *(Laughter.)* “Steve makes a sloshing good story”—something ridiculous! And Steve, actually, is a very, very sensitive man. He’s very quiet and he’s very shy. *(Laughter.)* I’ll do it to him on the phone, continuously, where I’ll say something and he won’t quite know if I’m joking or not. So there’ll be this long pause. And I’ll say, “Come on, Steve!”

LOU: *But I like him, ’cause he laughs at my jokes.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Yeah, I think I terrify him! I’m a bit of a bull in a china shop. *(Laughter.)*

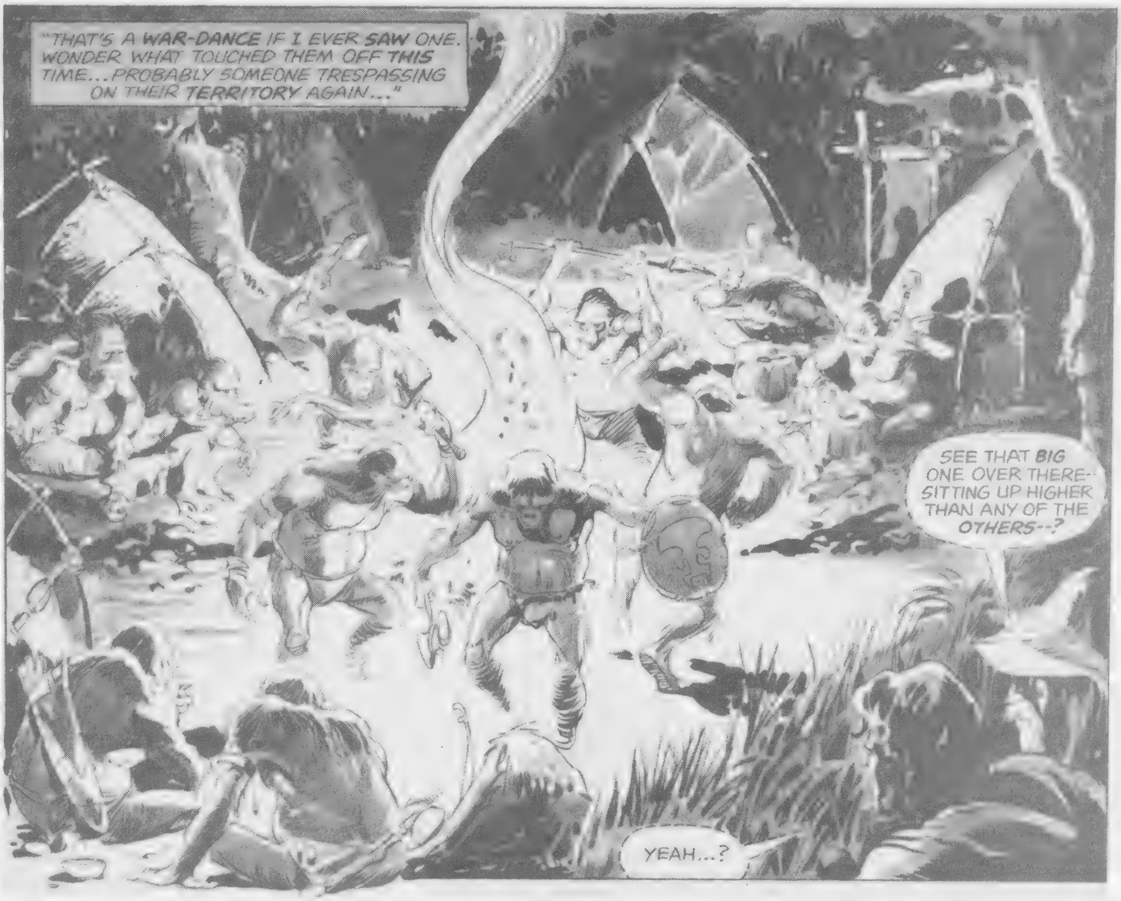
LOU: *So you’ve got comic books back in your blood?*

MIKE: Oh yeah. Actually, **Guy Delcour** in Paris, who’s published my SANTA CLAUS book, wants me to do a series of children’s-type books, aimed at children. I’m very, very interested in doing just that, because that appeals to me a great deal. It’ll be fantasy, fairy-tale kinds of kids’ books.

LOU: *Let’s do some vital statistics. Can you give me your family configuration?*

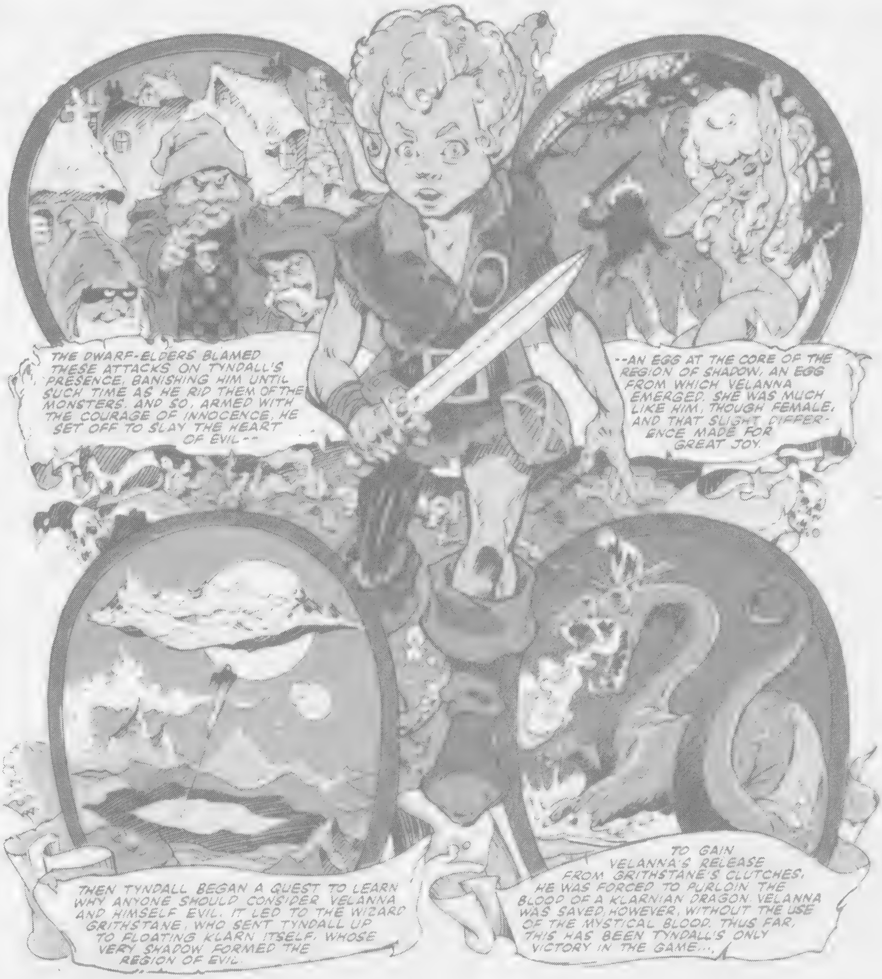
MIKE: My present family configuration? I’ve got a son named George who will be three in December. I have two daughters who are grown. They are 28 and 30, named Michelle and Diedre. And I have a stepson named Gerald, and a wonderful English wife named Janet. I met her while I was working on SUPER-

One example of Ploog’s PLANET OF THE APES for Marvel’s black-and-white magazines of the mid-’70s. Here, Mike teams once again with writer Doug Moench (special note: Mike did the full art — including “wash”).


"THAT'S A WAR-DANCE IF I EVER SAW ONE. WONDER WHAT TOUCHED THEM OFF THIS TIME... PROBABLY SOMEONE TRESPASSING ON THEIR TERRITORY AGAIN..."
SEE THAT BIG ONE OVER THERE-- SITTING UP HIGHER THAN ANY OF THE OTHERS--?
YEAH...?

PLANET OF THE APES © 20th Century Fox Film Corporation.

“The biggest thing I ever did was leave the Marines.”


THE DWARF-ELDERS BLAMED THESE ATTACKS ON TYNDALL'S PRESENCE, BANISHING HIM UNTIL SUCH TIME AS HE RID THEM OF THE MONSTERS. AND SO, ARMED WITH THE COURAGE OF INNOCENCE, HE SET OFF TO SLAY THE HEART OF EVIL--
--AN EGG AT THE CORE OF THE REGION OF SHADOW, AN EGG FROM WHICH VELANNA EMERGED. SHE WAS MUCH LIKE HIM, THOUGH FEMALE. AND THAT SLIGHT DIFFERENCE MADE FOR GREAT JOY.
THEN TYNDALL BEGAN A QUEST TO LEARN WHY ANYONE SHOULD CONSIDER VELANNA AND HIMSELF EVIL. IT LED TO THE WIZARD GRITHSTANE, WHO SENT TYNDALL UP TO FLOATING KLARN ITSELF, WHOSE VERY SHADOW FORMED THE REGION OF EVIL.
TO GAIN VELANNA'S RELEASE FROM GRITHSTANE'S CLUTCHES, HE WAS FORCED TO PURLOIN THE BLOOD OF A KLARNIAN DRAGON. VELANNA WAS SAVED, HOWEVER, WITHOUT THE USE OF THE MYSTICAL BLOOD. THUS FAR, THIS HAS BEEN TYNDALL'S ONLY VICTORY IN THE GAME...

A rare case of two comics greats merged together — Ploog’s pencils inked by P. Craig Russell! This WEIRDWORLD story (from MARVEL FANFARE #24, January, 1986), of which this is the splash of the first part, has a weird background. As editor Al Milgrom revealed in his Editori-Al: “Some fans are gonna scream ’cause these stories sat in inventory for a while!”

GIRL. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: (Laughter.) *Which is a nice way to meet a wife, I’m sure.*

MIKE: She still flies around here with a big red “S” on her shirt, or her knickers, or whatever.

LOU: *Just make sure she never gets around a guy who looks like the Anti-Monitor.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Besides the cat and the dog, that’s about it.

LOU: *What was your favorite comic book to work on?*

MIKE: That’s hard to say. I think it was my SANTA CLAUS book. I enjoyed doing that. It was a labor of love.

LOU: *It hasn’t come out in the States yet?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. It’s been out for several years. Tundra had it, and they didn’t know what to do with it, and it died the death here. But it’s been published in nine different languages. It’s really done well over the last few years. I did it about five years ago. It’s done very well in Europe. In Portugal, it was on their best seller list.

LOU: *I’m feeling awesomely ignorant about this thing!* (Laughter.) *But that’s not an unfamiliar feeling for me!*

MIKE: It was an adaptation I did of an **L. Frank Baum** story, THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS.

LOU: *What would be your all-time most awesome achievement?*

MIKE: Ah, jeez. The biggest thing I think I ever did in my life was to leave the Marine Corps after ten years. Because I had almost committed myself to twenty years. And after ten, I thought, “I cannot stand this for another minute.” *(Laughter.)* And I did not have a clue what I was going to do for a living. And if I hadn’t left the Marine Corps then, I probably wouldn’t ever have been a professional artist. And I think the biggest thing I ever did was to leave the Marine Corps after ten years.

LOU: *What do you like best about working in comics?*

MIKE: That it’s like you are making a motion picture, but you are the only person working on it. You’re not working with a crew of 200 people. It’s like a birth, watching it grow up, marrying it off, and watching its children grow. I love the idea of being that close to a story, and to write it, to direct it, to light it, to act in it, design the sets.

LOU: *That’s the kind of metaphor I think Milt Caniff used when he was doing STEVE CANYON. I think he’d been in theater at one time, and I think he said, “Every day I have to go out there and be director and make-up guy and casting guy and writer and producer and all that stuff.”*

MIKE: And you’re the actor!

LOU: *Right,* all *the actors. And the actresses!*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, **Caniff** hit it right on the nose, because that’s what it is. It’s a wonderful thrill when it works.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

A BIT SHAKEN BY IT ALL

Dear Publisher,

The comic-book field has changed. It would be a lie to say that I am not a bit shaken by it all (as I am sure we all are). After reading all the material floating around the industry, one thing has become perfectly clear. Everyone has to communicate more (retailers and publishers especially). Most publishers don't have the time to track down every retailer and small retailers many times don't have the financial ability to make it to conventions to make it known that they exist. Writing seemed the most reasonable way of saying I'm here, let me know what's going on.

Enclosed is a business card with our postal address, e-mail address, phone and fax numbers. Being a small store in a rural community, I can't guarantee that every project that comes out gets ordered. But any flyers that arrive get read and passed on to the customers I serve (as always they are the final judge). Whenever possible I will send back comments from myself (as well as customers), with the hope that they will help not hinder the creative (and marketing) process.

In closing let me add that, if it were not for independent publishers, many of my customers would have moved onto other things long ago. As for myself, comics in general helped me battle my learning disability and build up my self-confidence. We may not say it enough, but we appreciate all that you do. You give us something to look forward to week after week, and for all that, *thank you.*

Sean J. Brown, owner
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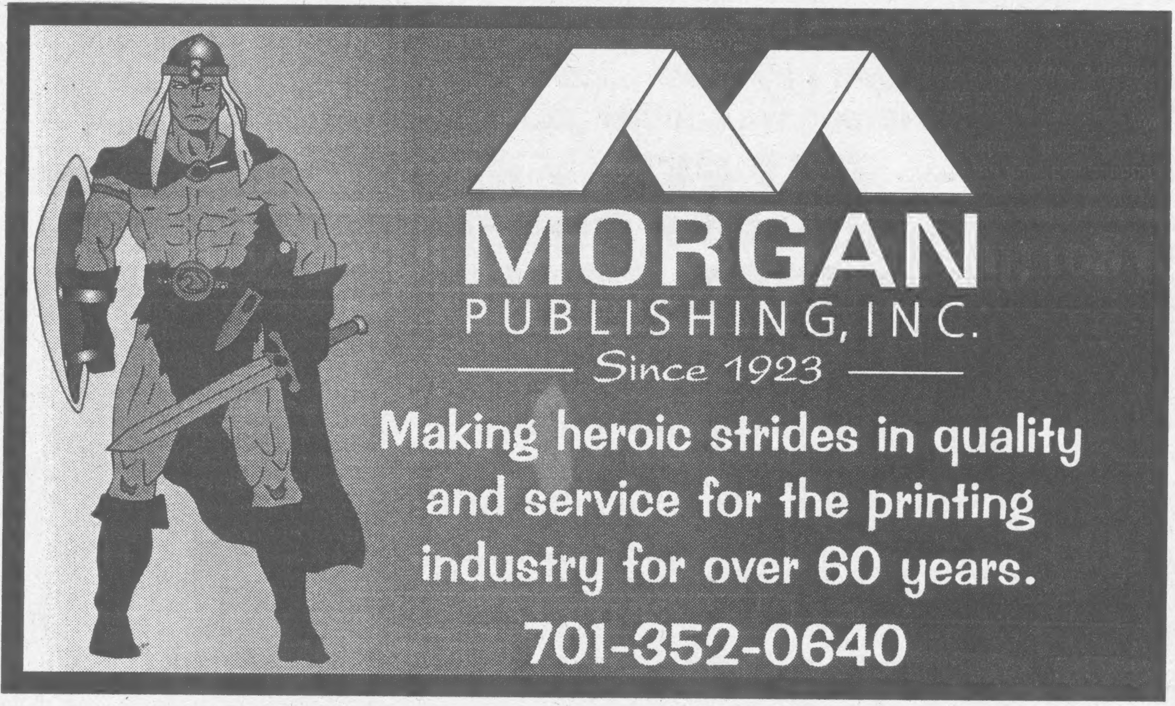

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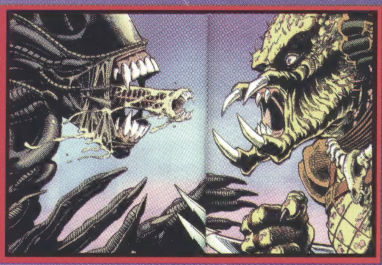

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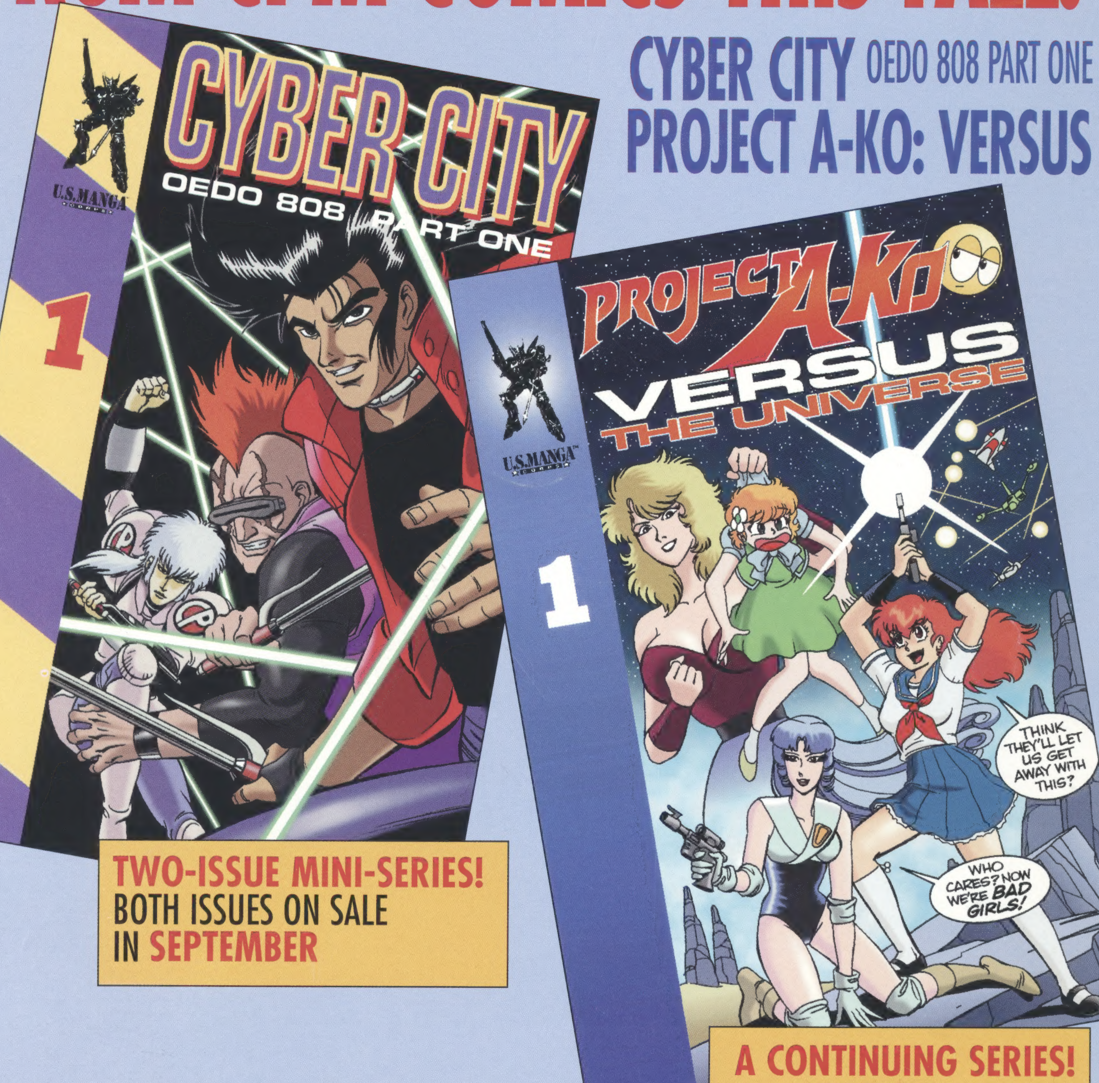
CYBER CITY OEDO 808 PART ONE

PROJECT A-KO: VERSUS


U.S.MANGA CORPS
CYBER CITY
OEDO 808 PART ONE
1
U.S.MANGA CORPS
PROJECT A-KO
VERSUS
THE UNIVERSE
1
THINK THEY'LL LET US GET AWAY WITH THIS?
WHO CARES? NOW WE'RE BAD GIRLS!

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CPM COMICS proudly presents **TWO NEW COMIC SERIES** based on U.S. Manga Corps' **HIT ANIMATED VIDEOS.** Journey into the future in **CYBER CITY OEDO 808,** where cyberpunk criminals are the cops and computers are the real criminal masterminds! Then explore an alternate reality in **PROJECT A-KO: VERSUS,** where Graviton City's favorite superpowered schoolgirls take off into outer space on a hilarious mission to save a universe that's probably not worth saving!

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